Dharma Talks

Dharma Talks

The Best of Dharmata

SECOND EDITION, REVISED AND ENLARGED

Alexander Duncan

EONIC PRESS ⊕ 2025

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Revised December 8 (Bodhi Day), 2025. Originally entitled *Dharma Notes.*

Printed in the United States of America

ISBN: 978-1-105-93846-7 (paper)

eonicpress.com
palisuttas.com

Dedicated to Dr. Robert Thurman, without whose encouragement this work would never have been written,
and to Five Masters: Shakyamuni, Padmasambhava, Gendün Chöepal, Seongcheol, and Kyentse Norbu

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Preface

This book originated in a booklet of 102 pages published by Chroniker (now Eonic) Press on July 8, 2012, entitled *Dharma Notes.* This was also the same year in which I renewed my bodhisattva vow in the Tibetan tradition, originally undertaken on June 26, 2011, as a direct result of which I have now written and published fifteen books, including six books of poetry and an original translation of the Tao Te Ching. *Dharma Notes* originally consisted of eleven short essays, the principal one of which was a study of the concept of karma in the Jataka tales of the Buddha, which I submitted to the Nalanda College of Buddhist Studies in Toronto as my final thesis. Eight years later, I completely revised the text, replacing all of the original chapters with an equal number of new and different essays which emerged out of my intervening activity as a guest dharma teacher at the Buddha Center, significantly expanded to 200 pages. This revised text was entitled *Dharma Talks.* At the same time, I changed the title of my website from Paliesque to Dharmata. Finally, now, in 2024, I have produced a Second Edition of *Dharma Talks,* consisting of the previous eleven chapters plus nine more, marked in the Table of Contents with a star. I have also significantly expanded the bibliography, as well as comprehensively reviewed and revised the entire text for republication. This new text is almost double the length of its predecessor, and, as indicated in the subtitle, represents the best of my website, Dharmata.

This new and completely revised edition of *Dharma Talks* represents an extensive and comprehensive critique of a variety of subjects of Buddhist interest, including original, early, and presectarian Buddhism; the Pali Canon; monasticism; soteriology; ethics; hagiography; cosmology; hermeneutics; human rights; Tibetology; and Taoism, written from a universal, nonsectarian perspective that honours all Buddhist norms. This new edition of *Dharma Talks* is designed as a companion volume to my comprehensive exegesis of the Digha and Majjhima Nikayas entitled

Conversations with the Buddha, originally published by Eonic Press on December 25, 2015.

I would like to thank my teachers, Sogyal Rinpoche (Rigpa), Suwanda Sugunasiri (Nalanda College of Buddhist Studies), Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche (Nalandabodhi Foundation), Shosen Michael Stone (Centre of Gravity Buddhist Association), and Dr. Alex Berzin (Berzin Archives), as well as Dr. Robert Thurman (Lotsawa House), without whose encouragement this book would never have been written; Dr. Sean Hillman, who has been a good dharma friend to me and has always answered my questions patiently and accurately; and my dharma cat, Zenji, who has been my constant companion during the long winter nights in the Canadian wilderness; and all the people in my life who have encouraged me in the dharma way for the past 44 years. ཨོཾ་སྭཱུཾ་བཛྲ་གུ་རུ་པདྨ་སིདྡྷི་ཧཱུྃ།

1
The Oldest Buddhist Scripture

PART I.

INTRODUCTION

Any tradition that attributes a special authority to one or more founders faces the same problem: How do we know what the original teachings were and, once we identify them, how are we to understand their meaning? The latter ranges from the problem of translation to the problem of understanding the meaning of meaning itself, while the former also relates to the problem of preservation. This aspect of Buddhism is like any other religion. Islam has the Qu'ran, Christianity the Gospel, the Jews the Torah; Hindus have the Vedas and the Upanishads, the Taoists have the Tao Te Ching. The historicity of some of these texts is ambiguous; in the case of traditions that emphasize an historical teacher, the hermeneutical problem is intensified. In the case of Buddhism, the primary historical source represents a developmental period of about 300 years.[1] Even if we reject the naïve hermeneutic that a

[1] Scholars traditionally believe that the Pali Canon was first written down on palm leaves during the Fourth Buddhist Council, during the reign of King Valagamba of Anuradhapura in the 1st century BCE, 29-17 BCE, but more recent scholarship puts the date closer to 89-77 BCE, less than two centuries after the dharma was codified during the reign of Ashoka (ca. 250 BCE), and just about three centuries after the 'passing' (parinibbana) of the Buddha according to the modern reckoning.

later text is automatically invalid, identifying the historical core of the original teaching is interesting, subject to the proviso that we cannot conflate "oldest" with "literally identical to the words of the Buddha," which are literally unknown and unknowable. Still less can we know what the Buddha thought. In addition, we may assume that there were many other texts of the same or even earlier provenance that were lost, or suppressed.

Even more vexed is the question whether originality even matters. Are the literal words of the Buddha necessarily definitive? The Buddha, like all historical phenomena, existed in a relative and contingent samsaric context, and therefore all his manifestations and appearances are karmically conditioned, including whatever insights concerning dharma that the Buddha bestowed directly upon his contemporaries and upon those of us who hear them indirectly. Even if we accept the archaic claim that the Buddha was omniscient (in some sense), we may question the omniscience of his disciples. Theravadins, anticipating this problem, insist that the arhants were infallible, but even this leaves open the questions of unknown teachings, lost texts, and subsequent misinterpretation by non-arhants. The evidence of the texts themselves is that the Buddha tailored his teachings to his audience. The true object of study in Buddhism is not the person or circumstances of the historical Buddha, it is what the Buddha himself indicated in his thoughts, words, and actions, i.e., the dharma, to which he pointed like the famous finger pointing at the moon. The Pali Canon says that the Buddha de-emphasized leadership and directed his followers to understand the dharma directly for themselves. Thus, Buddhology is based on a false premise. Any study of the oldest Buddhist scripture must have for its objective the revelation of the one true object of study, the dharma itself. This is a significantly larger study than historicism or even linguistics can muster. The Pali Canon says that the Buddha hesitated to teach, and finally only agreed to teach after being petitioned by God himself; he said he knew much, much more than he taught; he taught different truths to different people, based on their circumstances and needs, including morality to the householders, meditation to the monastics, and wisdom to the arhants. Dharma is protean and adjusts itself continuously to the circumstances of the time. For this reason alone, fundamentalism is fatuous.

Stratification in the Pali Canon has been a special subject of study for a century now, largely based on the linguistic studies of Pali specialists, but

most of the progress in the field was made by the time that Pande published the first edition of his *Studies in the Origin of Buddhism,* which he updated till his recent death in 2011. In that book, he cites a theory of stratification proposed by the great early 20th century Buddhist translator, T.W. Rhys Davids. Law's elaborate critique only reinforces Rhys Davids's conclusion, with a few minor changes that do not affect our argument here. According to both Rhys Davids and Law, the first (i.e., oldest) four items in the list are:

- The simple statements of Buddhist doctrine now found, in identical words, in paragraphs or verses recurring in all the books.[2]
- Episodes found, in identical words, in two or more of the existing books.
- The Silas, the Parayana, the Octades, the Patimokkha.
- The Digha, Majjhima, Anguttara, and Samyutta Nikayas.

Despite being written in elegant verse, its location in the Khuddaka Nikaya (generally associated with more recent texts), and having none of the ordinary signs of oral transmission (e.g., repetition and rhetorical formulas, multiple synonyms, stock phrases and passages, verse summaries, similes, numbered lists, and standard framing narratives), according to no less authorities than Rhys Davids and Law, the oldest extant doctrinal parts of the Pali Canon, setting aside the non-doctrinal ethical precepts and the rules of training, are (IV) the Octades (Atthakavagga, 'groups of eight') and (V) the Parayanavagga ('chapter of the final goal'). This is confirmed by H. Saddhatissa, whose translation of the Sutta Nipata is used by Bhikkhu Bodhi in his lectures on the Sutta Nipata (Saddhatissa adds I.3 as contemporary with the Atthaka and Parayana vaggas),[3] and by K.R. Norman, amongst others. Paradoxically,

[2] A separate stance has been taken by Stanislaw Schayer, a Polish scholar, in the 1930s. Schayer searched in the early texts for ideas that contradict the dominant doctrinal positions of the early canon. According to Schayer, these ideas have "been transmitted by a tradition old enough and considered to be authoritative by the compilers of the Canon. The last conclusion follows of itself: these texts representing ideas and doctrines contradictory to the generally admitted canonical viewpoint are survivals of older, pre-canonical Buddhism."

[3] This is the Khaggavisanasutta, the famed Rhinoceros Sutra, which advocates the life of a homeless wanderer, "as a beast unbound in the forest goes feeding at pleasure," free of emotional entanglements.

these are now found in the Sutta Nipata in the Khuddaka Nikaya, which is demoted to number five in Rhys Davids's list. Although a few more potentially archaic texts have been suggested, e.g., the Udanas, Itivuttaka, etc.,[4] the consensus view seems to be that the fourth and fifth chapters (vaggas) of the Sutta Nipata, denominated the Parayanavagga and the Atthakavagga,[5] are amongst the oldest if not the oldest canonical texts to survive today. It is therefore interesting to examine the teachings of these texts, considering the possibility that they are close to, if not identical with, the original teachings of the historical Buddha. According to Lebkowicz, Ditrich, and Pecenko, they are pre-monastic. Fausböll says that "we see here a picture not of life in monasteries, but of the life of hermits in its first stage. We have before us not the systematizing of the later Buddhist church, but the first germs of a system, the fundamental ideas of which come out with sufficient clearness." Since Buddhist monasticism was founded by Gotama Buddha himself, and the lands and buildings had already begun to be donated and built during his lifetime, this must have been very early indeed, when many monastics still lived or wandered solitary or in small groups. Alexander Wynne, citing the Atthakavagga, suggests that "much of what is found in the Suttapiṭaka is earlier than ca. 250 B.C., perhaps even more than one hundred years older than this," i.e., ca. 350 BCE at least. This is 50 years or so after the parinirvana, for which Wynne accepts Gombrich's date of 404 BCE. If we allow a margin for error of about 20 years, this is 30 to 80 AB approximately. In the Christian tradition, this would correspond to the late canonical period (approx. 60–110 CE).[6]

[4] Not accepted as early by Rhys Davids or Law. Law put these works at #7 out of 10, more recent than the nikayas and even the Jatakas. Gombrich seems to place the composition of most of the nikayas in the mid-4th century CE, about 55 years after the parinibbana. Rupert Gethin thinks that they are somewhat more recent. However, Gethin's own statement that they are the product of the "first few generations" after the Buddha's death places them no later than about 300 BCE. Hajime Nakamura puts their composition during the time of Ashoka, about 250 BCE. See Gethin, "Gethin on Gomrich" (see References for full bibliographic citations).

[5] The Atthakavagga also survives in Chinese translation as an independent work. Hajime Nakamura opines that it is likely that these existed during the Buddha's lifetime (*Indian Buddhism,* 45).

[6] For comparison, the Christian canonical period extends from 30 to 160 CE. This period includes many non-canonical texts as well, especially after 95 CE. Q, the original Christian scripture (reconstructed), is dated to 40–80 CE.

The Atthaka and the Parayana vaggas constitute the fourth and fifth chapters of the Sutta Nipata in the Minor Tradition (Khuddaka Nikaya). The Sutta Nipata consists of mixed verse and prose in five sections. The Atthakas and Parayanas consist of sixteen and seventeen short suttas or sutta-like texts, thirty-three in all. In English translation, it consists of sixty-eight pages, approximately 13,000 words, somewhat longer than the Tao Te Ching (10,000 words) or the Christian Q gospel (6,000 words). They do not appear to have been nearly as edited as the nikayas, probably because they are written in verse (Pande notes that verse form is more conservative in the Pali Canon though he rejects the assumption that verse must be automatically older than prose in the same text). The terminology and conceptual structures seem to be pre-nikaya and still in a process of formation (e.g., an interdependent origination consisting of seven nidanas instead of ten or twelve, with similar but more protean terminology, while ignorance is referred to but in a somewhat different way). The syntax is fresh and lively, full of vitality and enthusiasm. The tone is positive, even heroic. It is exciting to think that this may be the oldest surviving sutta collection, a literal remnant of the Buddha himself and one of the original seeds of the suttas of the Pali Canon.

Here I have used the English translation of V. Fausböll, published in 1881 in Max Müller's Sacred Books of the East series. Although there are more modern and poetical translations of the Sutta Nipata, Fausböll's literal translation has the virtue of adhering closely to the Pali as far as I can see so that there is less danger of misconstruing an interpretation of a modern translator for an original view of the Buddha. I have also compared several other translations (see References), especially that of K.R. Norman.

The Atthakavagga addresses such basic concerns as desire, attachment, philosophy, mindfulness, detachment, the nature of Buddhahood (referred to as "the Muni," or Sage, similar to the Tao Te Ching, and "Bhagavat," Lord), and the path. The suttas emphasize the importance of independence and disdain philosophizing and seeking salvation through others. We must save ourselves. The Buddha opposes the doctrine of self-purification through the cultivation of inward peace to the doctrine that one is purified by the practice of philosophizing based on speculation and argument. Even at this early date, we see the Buddha celebrated and even worshipped as a literal descendent of the Sun, a Muni, an Isi, and a Sambuddha ('perfectly or self-enlightened'). The Buddha is said to have been reborn from the Tushita ('satisfied') heaven, associated with the

bodhisattva doctrine. The Buddha is described as having the thirty-two marks of a great man and as having the psychic power of telepathy. The realm of the deities (devas), including earthbound devas and Mara, are also referred to. The path is described as both gradual and instantaneous. The Buddha prohibits some of the same superstitious practices, especially prognostication, which he criticizes in the first sutta of the Digha Nikaya, the Net of Confusion (Brahmajala Sutta). As observed by Mrs. C.A.F. Rhys Davids, asceticism is deemphasized. Pain is observed, but not cultivated. The liberated person is free from attachment and revulsion and sees happiness everywhere. They are friendly and tolerant to all, much like the kingly sage of Laozi. These texts, especially the Parayanavagga, introduce the same question and answer format that structures almost all the suttas, suggesting that this may have been the major teaching method used by the historical Buddha.

The study of the Atthaka and Parayana vaggas provides a window into the archaic dharma of the Buddha. It gives us an opportunity amongst other things to test the rationalist assumptions of the so-called modern or secular Buddhist movement.[7] In these vaggas one recognizes a broad range of doctrinal topics, including a system of epistemological, soteriological, ontological, cosmological, Buddhological, and ethical worldviews that anticipate similar doctrines that we find more thoroughly worked out in the nikayas.

In the following sections I will summarize the worldviews implicit in these texts in broad outline.

EPISTEMOLOGY

The Buddha affirms that the only eternal or ultimate truth is consciousness, and that truth is unitary. Thus, it is trans-dual. For this reason, the Buddha rejects sectarianism, scholasticism, asceticism, rationalism, dogmatism, and debate, and proposes a philosophy of no philosophy, which is identified with wisdom, rather like Zen.

[7] See Wikipedia, "Buddhist Modernism" and "Secular Buddhism." Some other cognate terms are agnostic Buddhism, "ignostic" Buddhism, atheistic Buddhism, pragmatic Buddhism, modern Theravada, progressive Theravada, original Buddhism, core Buddhism, mainstream Buddhism, Protestant Buddhism, British Buddhism, and academic Buddhism.

SOTERIOLOGY

For there to be salvation there must be a "fall." Thus, the Buddha identifies ignorance and desire as the primary binary that binds us to "reiterated existence" (rebirth) in time. He repudiates desire, grasping, and the body and stresses the inferiority of the body, existence, and the householder life of possessiveness, territoriality, and war. The Buddha rejects self-purification by knowledge, actions (i.e., karma, as in Jainism), religious tradition (Brahmanism), sacrifice, or by following others. He proposes that one must purify oneself through the progressive practice of detached indifference, the cultivation of inner peace (tranquility) and mindfulness or "thoughtfulness," sitting in secluded meditation in the wilderness, at the foot of a tree, in a cemetery (like the Shaivites), or in a cave on a mountain. The Buddha posits a mode of knowledge by which one is purified, which is unitary and trans-dual and can be realized by the practice of mental concentration. By these means, a transcendent state of realization is progressively induced that leads to the perfect, immortal, and timeless security of nirvana, in which desire itself is extinguished. Elsewhere meditation is described as the realization of emptiness, nothingness, or the void, which corresponds to the fundamental ontological state. Nirvana is a state beyond ego-centred consciousness itself. Those who attain this state are described as "men who have crossed the stream." The realization of nirvana itself is instantaneous, immediate, and uncharacterizable.

ONTOLOGY

Existence is described as suffering and impermanent. Beings are trapped in an endless cycle of rebirth, but the very impermanent and temporary nature of existence implies that it is possible to escape into non-rebirth by transcending the whole sevenfold system of interdependent origination by which name and form (individuality) lead to "touch" (contact), decay and origin, pleasure and pain (feeling), will (intention), grasping, and finally suffering (ignorance is mentioned elsewhere as "the head"). We recognize here a primitive form of the familiar doctrine of paticcasamuppadda (lit. 'following from anything as a necessary result with coming into existence'). The law of cause and effect (karma) driven by intentional mental activity (sankhara) is the essential kinetic principle. At the same time, the world is described as essentially illusory, empty, and void.

COSMOLOGY

The Atthaka and Parayana vaggas allude to the familiar elements of Buddhist cosmology, including other worlds, deities or devas, Mara, and the Tushita heaven (IV. 16. 1), the latter the heaven from which the Buddha-to-be was reputedly reborn. This corresponds to the bodhisattva idea, whereas the rhinoceros (of the Rhinoceros Sutra) is a symbol associated with the pratyekabuddha or "hermit." The rhinoceros is as unlike the contemporary image of the monastic as one can imagine.

BUDDHOLOGY

The Buddha is referred to by his family or clan name of Gotama and described as a man, as well as by the mysterious term "tathagata," 'he who having come this way has thus gone that way to suchness.' He is described as wise and great, a World Teacher, as well as being omniscient, that is, he has perfect understanding. He is distinguished by the thirty-two marks of a great man, and is identified as a descendant of the Sun and symbolically with both the sun and the moon.

ETHICS

The Buddha advocates an ordinary ethical life of moderation and self-restraint. Although it would be a logical error to infer that because this is the oldest surviving text, it necessarily is complete and therefore exclusive of all other texts – many other similar texts were presumably lost or subsumed into later texts – what the text does say is of more than passing interest since this is the closest we can get to what the Buddha actually taught, composed perhaps no later than a single generation (20 years?) after his death. The text has a fresh and lively voice and originality of diction that radiate the vigour and vitality of beginnings. In particular, it appears as a virtual hologram of the doctrines found in the nikayas, including such advanced concepts as trans-duality, the unity of truth, the philosophy of no philosophy, gradual and instantaneous realization, rebirth, karma, Mara, devas, other worlds, the Tushita "heaven" ("dimension" might be a better word), and the transcendent nature of Buddhahood itself. Far from being late ideas, these doctrines are clearly inherent in the fundamental substrate of the Buddhist oeuvre. This contrasts sharply with the modern secularist view that the historical development of Buddhist doctrine represents a degeneration from an

original ideal devoid of "superstitious" elements. The Atthaka and Parayana vaggas are extremely sophisticated philosophical documents, comparable to the Tao Te Ching.

A close evaluation of the Atthaka and Parayana vaggas discovers allusions to trans-dualism; trans-rationalism; rebirth (which some modern or secular-minded modern Buddhists would like to abandon); ethical indifference (very like Jesus' injunction not to judge); individualism; the nirvana element or "realm"; emptiness; instantaneous enlightenment; the planes of existence; and the omniscience and perfection of the Buddha, including the thirty-two "supernatural" marks of a great man. The Atthaka and Parayana vaggas do not support the view that these doctrines are later accretions. Rather, the whole oeuvre appears to inhere in its historical ground. To say that they do not originate with the Buddha is therefore a dogmatic and unprovable assumption.

PROLOGUE OF THE PARAYANAVAGGA

The Atthaka and Parayana vaggas consist mostly of direct teachings of the Buddha or short question and answer sessions with individuals with little or no additional historical or biographical details. The single exception is the Prologue to the Parayanavagga, called the Vatthugatha (lit. 'story in verse'). Because of its singular nature in the context of these texts, I am going to summarize it here. Both Rhys Davids and Law place the Parayanavagga before the Atthakavagga, but Law specifically excepts the Prologue, suggesting that it is later, though he does not mention it elsewhere in his scheme. It may, therefore, be the oldest Buddhist historical account.

The story is situated south of Savatthi, the capital of Kosala, where many of the later suttas are also located. Bavari, a brahmana, whose name means "enemy of worldly existence," dwelled near Alaka, on the banks of the Godhavari, a river in the territory of Assaka, "wishing for nothingness." Assaka was the most southern mahajanapada. The Godavari river is the second longest river in India, after the Ganges, and runs from west to east across central India. Like many ascetics of the time, including the Buddha, Bavari lived outside a village where he could obtain the requisites, including enough money, apparently, to hold a great sacrifice. After this, another brahmana arrived, "with swollen feet, trembling, covered with mud, with dust on his head," who immediately demanded five hundred pieces of money. Bavari treated the other brahmana with the utmost

courtesy and respect, but apologetically explained that, having spent all of his money on a great sacrifice, he had no money left to give to the brahmana. Offended, perhaps even enraged, the brahmana proceeded to curse Bavari, declaring that after seven days his head would cleave into seven pieces. This is a common curse that one finds repeated elsewhere in the Pali Canon.

Bavari became sorrowful and began to waste away, taking no food, but at the same time he continued to delight in meditation. After some time the benevolent deity of the place, presumably a benign earthbound deva, appeared to Bavari and explained to him that the other brahmana is a hypocrite and an impostor, knowing nothing about heads or head splitting, thus rather strangely segueing into the topic of the story and indeed of the vagga. Thus, the Parayanavagga is in fact a precis of the salvific wisdom of the dharma itself.

Bavari asks the deva to explain to him about heads and head splitting, but the deva does not know anything about it, saying that this knowledge is limited to buddhas. Bavari asks the deva who he can approach for an explanation, and the deva tells Bavari that a World Ruler, a descendent of King Ikshvaku (Skt. Okkaka), the first king of the Ikshvaku or solar dynasty, has gone out of Kapilavatthu, the capital of the Shakyans. This identification of the Buddha as a descendent of the righteous and glorious king Ikshvaku suggests the descent of Jesus from King David. The solar dynasty is also important in Jainism, since twenty-two out of twenty-four of the Jain tirthankaras belonged to this dynasty, and to Hindus, whose culture hero, Rama, of the Ramayana, also belonged to the prestigious solar dynasty. According to the Buddhist texts the founder of the solar dynasty was Mahasammata, the first king of the current age, who was democratically elected. The deva describes the Buddha as "light-giving": "He is, O Brahmana, the perfectly enlightened (Sambuddha); perfect in all things, he has attained the power of all knowledge, sees clearly in everything; he has arrived at the destruction of all things, and is liberated in the destruction of the upadhis," referring to the "fuel of life" that precipitates rebirth. "He is Buddha, he is Bhagavat in the world; he, the clearly-seeing, teaches the Dhamma" (V. 1. 17). Bhagavat means "the Adorable One," and in Hinduism is a term for Krishna or God. This passage again alludes to the salvific knowledge or "power of truth."

Bavari, his spirits revived, asks the deva where he might find this chief of the world, this first of men, so that he might go there and worship him.

Referring to the Buddha by the Jain term Jina, "Victorious One," and as a "bull of men," the deva tells Bavari that the Buddha is staying in Savatthi. Bavari then goes to his sixteen brahmana disciples, including the great rishi Pingiya, to go to Savatthi to see the Buddha for themselves. His disciples ask Bavari how they will recognize him. Bavari tells them that the hymns, referring presumably to the Vedas, refer to thirty-two marks of a great man, and that they can recognize him by these signs. Interestingly, no such hymn has ever been identified. Bhikkhu Sujato has suggested that the marks might be Babylonian in origin.[8] Whatever their origin, their presence in the Prologue of the Parayanavagga clearly indicates their archaic origin. Bavari tells his disciples that such a one will either become a peaceful and just World Ruler or a saintly Sambuddha who will remove the veil from the world. Bavari also tells them that they will also know the Buddha because he will answer the questions that are in their mind without asking.

Bavari's disciples travel north to Savatthi to find the Buddha, along with a large number of their own students. Bavari's disciples are described as advanced philosophers and meditators, with matted hair or dreadlocks and wearing animal hides. In the Tibetan tradition they would be called mahasiddhas. They travel through a succession of cities, including Savatthi, but finally they find the Buddha at the top of a mountain near Vesali, Magadha, in the Barabar Hills north of Gaya (Dhammika), called the Rock Temple (pasanaka cetiya, lit. 'stone tope'), southeast of Savatthi. Here the Buddha was teaching dharma to the monastics, "like a lion roaring in the forest." Ajita, apparently the leader, beholds the Buddha as a sun or a moon, and perceives all of the thirty-two marks of a great man on his body. Asking the questions concerning Bavari in his mind, the Buddha tells him that Bavari is 120 years old; his name; that he has three of the marks of a great man (long tongue, tuft of hair between the eyebrows, and a sheathed penis),[9] and that he is perfect in the three Vedas. Satisfied, Ajita gets to the point, and asks the Buddha about the head and head splitting. The Buddha tells Ajita that the head refers to ignorance, and that knowledge (gnosis) cleaves the head, along with belief, thoughtfulness, meditation, determination, and strength.

[8] "On the Thirty-Two Marks." Coincidentally, there are thirty-two base pairs that define the sixty-four codons of the human genetic code.

[9] Establishing a principle of proportionality between the marks and one's degree of realization.

This metaphorical identification of ignorance with the head and head splitting – the destruction of ignorance – with knowledge is exceptionally interesting, and proves among other things that the Buddha's criticism of "philosophizing" clearly does not extend to a rejection of knowledge or wisdom as such. The implication rather is that knowledge or wisdom is the salvific principle, as we have discussed elsewhere. To refer to this special kind of knowledge I have used the English word gnosis. Ignorance of course becomes the root or "head" of the doctrine of interdependent origination.[10] Ajita puts his animal hide on one shoulder, falls down before the Buddha, and "salutes him with his head," perhaps kneeling before the Buddha and touching his forehead to the ground in an act of prostration. Ajita apparently has Bavari's warrant to act on his behalf, for he tells the Buddha on behalf of Bavari and his disciples that they pay homage to the Buddha's feet (perhaps Bavari was too old to make this long journey himself, despite his former expression of his wish to do so). The Buddha wishes Bavari and Ajita, described as a young man, well. Wishing them happiness and long life, the Buddha then invites Ajita and the disciples to ask him whatever questions they wish. Ajita and the other disciples then ask the Buddha a series of philosophical and soteriological questions in the next sixteen suttas, which make up the Parayanavagga.

These explanations represent a collation of the relevant references in these texts and follow the texts closely, with a minimum of interpretation, which I will leave for the Conclusion.

PART II.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF NO PHILOSOPHY

I'm going to start with epistemology, the study of knowing, first, because of the weight that these two vaggas put on what I have chosen to call "the philosophy of no philosophy." Philosophy, philosophizing, and/or philosophers are discussed in no less than eight suttas of the Atthaka vagga (IV. 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13). In IV.3, the Buddha says, "the dogmas of philosophy are not easy to overcome." On the other hand, the independent one, i.e., the follower of the Buddha, "has shaken off every (philosophical) view." One is reminded of the first sutta of the Digha Nikaya, the Brahmajala Sutta, where the Buddha disdains philosophizing

[10] Ignorance is also described as a shroud that covers the world in the Parayanavagga.

as a "base art." Ironically, this discussion of conflict avoidance breaks out into an open argument between Magandiya and the Buddha (IV. 9.6, 7). The Buddha makes it quite clear that "if a man's purification takes place by (his philosophical views), or he by knowledge leaves pain behind, then he is purified by another way than the ariyamagga, i.e., the noble way" (IV. 4). The Buddha considers that philosophizing creates division and discord (IV. 5.1), Therefore a bhikkhu "does not depend even on knowledge. He does not associate with those that are taken up by different things, he does not return to any (philosophical) view" (IV. 5. 5). The Pasurasutta (IV. 8) includes an extensive description of philosophical debates that we find elsewhere described in the Pali Canon. "Seeing this," says the Buddha, "let no one dispute, for the expert do not say that purification (takes place) by that" (IV. 8. 7). Nevertheless, the Buddha acknowledges that philosophy can take one part of the way (IV. 8. 11, V. 14. 3), and appears to distinguish between understanding and "philosophical views" (IV. 9. 13). In antithesis to the view that philosophical knowledge is salvific, the Buddha declares that the truly salvific thing is a state of inward peace and outward indifference. Only this state confers true wisdom and happiness, yet wisdom is also praised (IV. 16. 15; V. 12. 1; V. 17. 13, 15, 17); "inward peace" itself is referred to as "truth" (dharma), and trans-rationalism or the trans-linguistic (V. 7. 6-8). He also asserts that the sage does not reject anything (IV. 9. 5) and is liberated by knowledge (V. 1. 51). Clearly, the relationship between knowledge and wisdom is subtle and complex. This notion of the true sage being indifferent to formal learning or formal academic knowledge is strongly reminiscent of the Tao Te Ching.

MEDITATION

Buddhism is not merely or even primarily a theory. The Buddha says that he understood the theory of emancipation prior to his enlightenment, but it was not until he understood the praxis of emancipation that he became enlightened and began to teach others. Therefore, it is of special interest to know what the Buddha said about meditation in the Atthaka and Parayana vaggas.

The Buddha advises his followers to "cultivate the mind of a recluse." Instead of seeking salvation through philosophical argument, knowledge, virtue (ethics), or "holy works" (merit), the Buddhist should seek salvation through the cultivation of "inward peace" and tranquility, and the cultivation of an attitude of perfect tolerance, neither accepting nor

rejecting anything. The Buddha identifies three types of consciousness that are not conducive to liberation, including "natural consciousness," insanity, and unconsciousness, the latter being an error that is identified in later suttas as leading to rebirth in the Asanna satta, the realm of unconscious beings, just below the Five Pure Abodes, the place where non-returners and arhants with residue are reborn interestingly. Thus, the Buddha makes it clear that a type of superconsciousness, for lack of a better term, characterizes the attainment of nirvana, also referred to as the "cessation of consciousness," but it is clear from the text that cessation of consciousness does not imply unconsciousness. Rather, it seems to refer to the impercipience (V. 14. 7) of a "dispossessed mind" (V 16. 26). Once again, we see the importance of collating all relevant texts to avoid misunderstandings. The Buddha advises his followers to be still, without desire; to be meditative; watching; and to sit down quietly. One is to "drive off the agitations of the mind" with an equanimous, calm, composed mind; thoughtful, with mind liberated; intent on a single object (concentrated).

The Buddha appears to equate meditation with "wishing for nothingness" or "having in view nothingness," neither grasping nor rejecting anything. Interestingly, the Parayanavagga says that the knowledge of "heads and head-splitting" is only found among buddhas, the head being equated with ignorance and head splitting with the abolition of ignorance. Ignorance of course became the root of interdependent origination in later texts: "Ignorance is the head, know this; knowledge cleaves the head, together with belief [faith], thoughtfulness [mindfulness], meditation [concentration], determination [resolution], and strength [energy]" (V. 1. 51). Clearly, therefore, the Buddha is making a distinction between philosophical argument and another sort of knowledge ("having been delivered in the highest deliverance by knowledge"), characterized as wisdom, and referred to as the Divine Eye (ajna chakra). A passage in V. 10. 4 seems to allude to the yogic doctrine that one stops breathing in advanced stages of meditation (jhana), which one also finds in Patanjali. The culmination of meditation is nirvana, the "extinction" of desire. Yet even the Buddha meditates, the text tells us, a fact reiterated in the later suttas.

ARHANT AND BODHISATTVA

The Atthaka and Parayana vaggas make a clear distinction between those who live in the cave, rather strikingly anticipating Plato's parable of

the cave (Fausböll equates the cave with the body) and those who have crossed the stream (gone to the other shore). This then is the fundamental soteriological project of Buddhism.

Those who have liberated themselves from "reiterated existences" (samsara, 'rebirth' but also time) are called muni ('sage'), brahmana ('knower of the Absolute or Ultimate Reality'), isi ('seer,' a Vedic rishi), and "men who have crossed to the other shore."

The Buddha too is referred to as Muni, Brahmana, and Isi, but is also associated with a separate set of specialized terms, including Bhagavat ('holy,' 'fortunate one'), Gotama (the reputed family name of the Buddha, meaning 'one whose brilliance dispels darkness'), "kinsman of the Adiccas" ('solar dynasty'), Buddha ('awakened'), Sakka ('able,' the name of the Buddha's clan), "the light-giving," Sambuddha ('omniscient' or 'self-enlightened'), "clearly-seeing" ("all-seeing one"), "chief (naga) of the world," "perfectly enlightened," "first of men," Jina ('conqueror,' 'victor,' a Jain term), "bull of men," Tathagata ('he who has thus come and gone to that'), noble ('naga'), "thou with the born eye (of wisdom)," as well as hero, divine, exemplary, supreme, and lord.

Brahmanas are reputed to be perfect buddhas (V. 15. 4) (alternatively, the Buddha declares himself a perfect brahmana; unlike the Brahman caste of the later suttas that are criticized for their worldliness, these brahmanas are holy men).[11] The brahmana Bavari defers to the Buddha and refers his students (described as youthful) to the Buddha and recommends that they go to visit him (V. 1. 23). Posala and Pingiya both become followers of the Buddha, despite being described as a brahmana and an isi respectively themselves. The venerable Pingiya says, "There is only one abiding dispelling darkness, that is the high-born, the luminous, Gotama of great understanding, Gotama of great wisdom" (V. 17. 13), thus affirming the primogeniture and singularity of the Buddha, who is self-enlightened, and credits the Buddha for teaching him, a rishi, the dharma (V. 17. 14; cf. V. 17).

The superiority of the Buddha is, therefore, implicit in these texts. Moreover, the texts also imply that the Buddha is referring back to an ancient tradition that underlies Brahmanism itself as a sort of "spiritual Brahmanism." While the bhikkhu who succeeds in the Buddhist project is clearly emancipated from samsara, his attainment is distinguished from

[11] Presumably these were brahman recluses contemporary with the Buddha. Norman simply refers to them as "brahmans."

that of the Buddha, who is omniscient, all-seeing, chief of the world, perfectly enlightened, first of men, and supreme. Moreover, the texts refer to the Buddha's having been reborn from the Tushita heaven, which is later identified in the Pali suttas with the place from which bodhisattvas are reborn. Thus, while we do not find the words "arhant" or "bodhisattva" in these texts, the same distinction that underlies these terms is clearly implied. There is therefore no evidentiary or necessary logical basis for the dogma that the distinction between the arhant and the bodhisattva is not original.

THE DEATHLESS

The Buddha talks about crossing the stream and going to the other shore, but what does this mean? Is salvation only psychological, or is it also ontological? The Buddha raises this issue when he asks the question, putting it in the mouths of the greedy, "What will become of us, when we die away from here?" The Buddha's answer is clear insofar as the wicked are concerned: desire for reiterated existence leads to rebirth in unfortunate states. But what of those who liberate themselves from sensual desire? What sort of future state do they experience? The Buddha makes it clear that salvation does not imply rebirth in any other world, because all worlds are subject to the same suffering. Therefore, the liberated muni ('sage') neither longs for rebirth nor is reborn in any state. Does this mean that they, not being reborn, cease to exist in any sense? Is the Buddha here teaching some sort of mystical nihilism? The muni is beyond designation, because they do not cling to any philosophical view. They are uncharacterizable, because they do not cling, neither accepting nor rejecting anything. "Having gone to the other shore, such a one does not return" (IV. 5. 8).

The Buddha says that "only the name (nama) remains undecayed of the person who has passed away" (IV. 6. 5). According to the PED, this nama is the immaterial aspect of namarupa, "name and form," that constitutes the individual. Nama itself consists of four mental factors: vedana ('feeling'), sanna ('sensation'), sankhara ('mental activity' or thinking), and vinnana ('consciousness' or intuition), corresponding neatly to the four Jungian functions of the psyche. Therefore, nama = psyche. The implication of this passage for the muni is obscure, however, because the muni is said to be nameless. The Buddha may simply be referring to the continuity of rebirth, in the context of the post-mortem survival of the

human personality (cf. IV. 6. 4), or even ironically to the memory of one's heirs and descendants, so this passage is ambiguous.

The Buddha says that the muni "does not enter time, being delivered from time" (IV. 10. 13; cf. 13. 17). He neither belongs to time, nor is he dead (IV. 13. 20). The Buddha also says that consciousness is an eternal truth (IV. 12. 9). This implies that consciousness itself persists in an eternal "now-state." For the muni there is no death and no rebirth (IV. 13. 8). He goes to the immortal [deathless] region (IV. 16. 6).[12] The 'deathless' is one of the main tropes of the Pali Canon, referred to by the Buddha frequently.

THE WAY OF THE TRANS-DUAL

Whether the Buddha taught the doctrine of the trans-dual is one of the most hotly contested questions in Buddhist studies. Bhikkhu Bodhi commits Theravada to a dualistic view in his essay, "Dharma and Non-duality."[13] Therefore my defence of trans-dualism (not, note, non-dualism; trans-dualism includes both non-dualism and dualism, including the dualism of non-dualism and dualism itself, with trans-dualism as the fourth point of the quaternary or "tetralemma") in this context is bound to be controversial. However, I see no other context in which to interpret the transcendence of good and evil (IV. 4. 3), the non-existence of "notions" or concepts such as equality, lowness, and distinction or equality and inequality (IV. 5. 4, 9. 9, 10. 8, 13), "no desire for both ends" (i.e., extremes) (IV. 6), "single truths" (the context makes it clear that the Buddha is referring to mutually exclusive or contradictory statements, i.e., to the law of contradiction) (IV. 8.1), the binary character of dharma (11. 7), "name and form" (namarupa) (11. 11, V. 2. 6, 12. 5), "the truth is one, there is not a second" (IV. 12 . 7), the "double dhamma, truth and falsehood" (the implication being that the true dharma is transcendent) (12. 9), and ultimate (eternal) and relative truth (relative truth is dualistic, and eternal truth is trans-dual) (12. 9), as well as numerous additional references in the later suttas. There is in fact only one eternal or absolute truth, mind or consciousness itself, which is trans-dual and inherently

[12] Gaccato amatam disam, lit. 'goes to the ambrosial quarter.' Pali amatam refers to amrita, a.k.a. soma, the psychedelic drink of the gods that confers deathlessness or immortality in Indian tradition, the recipe for which has been lost.

[13] "The teaching of the Buddha as found in the Pali Canon does not endorse a philosophy of non-dualism of any variety, nor, I would add, can a non-dualistic perspective be found lying implicit within the Buddha's discourses."

empty yet infinitely differentiating itself in samsara by means of the illusion of difference (= atta, self-identity or ego), driven by the ultimate kinetic principle (will or intention) expressed as cause and effect (karma).

This is moreover the synthetic position, reconciling all other views. It comes as no surprise to discover the theme of the trans-dual in the Atthakavagga and Parayana vaggas. The identification of realization with the trans-dual and the essential nothingness, emptiness, or voidness of all extremes is a universal feature of all wisdom traditions everywhere and therefore a part of the perennial philosophy (= the ancient tradition). If the lock is complex and the key fits, then the key is the truth. The doctrine of voidness (see below) also implies the trans-dual because it is empty yet all-inclusive (0 = 1, the primary binary in unity or the yabyum of existence, the cosmic egg).

Any paradox essentially indicates the trans-dual.

THE WORLD IS VOID

The Buddha says that "the world is completely unsubstantial" (IV. 15. 3; "look upon the world as void" (V. 16. 4). The realization of the impermanent, insubstantial, illusory, ephemeral, and mirage-like nature of the world corresponds to the experience of the void, nothing, nowhere. Thus, the void, nothing, nowhere become designations of the ultimate nature of the world of samsara, the ground of which is reality itself.

THE PLANES OF EXISTENCE

Samsara is represented by an equilateral cross with a central point (V.5. 7, 6. 8, 13. 3). This symbol is a universal archetype, similar to the swastika, the Ethiopian cross, and the central symbol of the Rosicrucian Order, amongst others. The horizontal plane represents the ordinary world of three-dimensional extension,[14] which Buddhists and Taoists describe as the ten thousand worlds – the infinitely differentiated and differentiating order of stars, galaxies, and universes. The vertical vector or ray represents the extraordinary world of vertical extension, ranging from lowest frequency or vibration (the material or sensual polarity referred to as the kamaloka) to the highest (the spiritual polarity referred to as the

[14] The possibility that the universe that we experience is a three-dimensional projection of a two-dimensional diffraction pattern or hologram at the event horizon of a black hole is a serious theory of modern science.

arupaloka). The central point is the individual point of view, the mind stream, which is not a "self" but rather a trans-temporal sentient continuity that has no extension and therefore no self-identity yet is the root of differentiation itself, without which samsara itself is inexplicable.

The complete Buddhist cosmology of thirty-one planes of existence divided into various worlds and groups of worlds is not found in the Atthaka and Parayana vaggas. However, there are tantalizing references to other worlds, devas, Mara, and especially the Tushita heaven, the only world to be specifically named in these texts. The Tushita or "satisfied" world is four realms above the human world, third of the sensual realm and twenty-third in the realm of samsara. The Tushita devas include the bodhisattvas, who according to tradition are born here prior to their final birth as a human being. It is intriguing that this specific world is the only one named in these texts and that the Buddha is specifically mentioned to have been reborn in the human world after having resided in the Tushita realm.

THE COSMIC BUDDHA

The Buddha is referred to by a number of honorifics, including Muni ('sage'), Bhagavat ('holy', a follower of Vishnu; the Hindus regard the Buddha as an avatar or emanation of Vishnu), Jina ('Victorious, also a Jain term), supreme Buddha ('awakened'), Gotama ('the one who dispels darkness by brilliance,' the reputed family name or clan name of the Buddha), samana ('recluse'), kinsman of the Adiccas ('sun'), "the Isi ('seer' or rishi, a direct allusion to the Vedic tradition) of exemplary conduct," Sambuddha ('one of clear or perfect knowledge'), Shakyan ('able', referring to the Buddha's people), Tathagata ('one who having come thus has gone to suchness'), master, teacher, bull of men, the man of excellent understanding, the all-seeing one, "hero free from lust," "thou with the born eye (of wisdom)," "he who shows the past," "a perfect, accomplished Brahmana," and "this man who sees what is good."

The Buddha himself is characterized as venerable, light-giving (luminous), perfectly enlightened, clear-sighted (clearly seeing), first of men, best of men, chief of the world, of great understanding (of excellent wise knowledge or great wisdom), "unyoked," free from passion, "skilled in head-splitting" (i.e., dispelling ignorance, located in the head), accomplished, cultivated, houseless (homeless), free from commotion, "liberated, who leaves time behind," doubtless, accomplished in all things,

aware of past shapes, leaderless, "knowing all the faces of consciousness," divine, famous, "darkness dispelling," high-born, and free from harshness.

Thus, the Buddha is described as extremely wise or even omniscient; ecstatic; transcendent or god-like; virtuous or self-controlled; noble; and enlightened or luminous.

The Buddha is clearly distinguished from the "men who have crossed the stream" by a significant number of superlative qualities.

BEYOND GOOD AND EVIL

The monastic should not desire extremes. The one who clings not abides in a state of "inward peace;" they do not grasp or reject anything. The brahmana does not cling to virtue or holy works, either to their presence or to their absence. They are not led by holy works. The dharmic sage does not prefer anything. They are indifferent and tolerant. The "philosophizers" call what they devote themselves to "good" (the irony is palpable). Fools make their own views the truth, therefore they hold others to be fools (IV. 12. 5). Therefore the brahmana does not cling to virtue, holy works, merit, good, or evil (IV. 4. 3). He lets it all go. This view is the opposite of the view of the moralizer, and allows for moral ambiguity of the type that we see for example in the Angulimala Sutta, which was highly developed by the Tibetans.

CONCLUSION

Barring a major new discovery, the Atthaka and Parayana vaggas are as close as we can get to the actual utterance of the historical Buddha. At the same time, they are interpretations developed over the course of the first few decades after the Buddha's death, presumably in all sincerity based on an oral transmission that there is no reason not to believe began soon after the parinirvana. Once we recognize that the true object of Buddhist studies is not the Buddha but the dharma, the historical problem becomes less palpable since the person of the Buddha, himself merely one of many, becomes less significant. Contrast this with Christianity, for which the central fact of the resurrection assumes preëminent importance since without this magical act humanity is doomed to damnation. According to the vaggas, the Buddha encouraged independent inquiry, denied that anyone could save another, and referred all spiritual seekers to their own judgment. He rejects salvation by philosophical argument, ordinary

knowledge, good works, merit, or others. The Buddha encouraged his followers to be tolerant and appreciate different points of view, for the dharma is trans-rational, trans-linguistic (see Norman, V. 7. 1076), and experientially and ultimately individual, though it can also be understood (being trans-dual) as a collective phenomenon too. Nonsectarianism and the rejection of fundamentalism both follow logically from these premises, and the Buddha strongly emphasizes the futility of dogmatism, philosophical debate, and argument. In later texts the Buddha is portrayed as one who seeks out common ground, is compassionate and concerned, and addresses the individuality of those who came to him for guidance. The dharma is not reducible to a formula. It is an active search for the meaning of the transcendental object translated into the four dimensions of human experience which are always changing. The dharma is a wheel that turns forever and cannot be stopped. Thus, today we might understand the omniscience of the Buddha as perfect metaphysical understanding through the actual experience of the clarity of enlightenment, whereas those of earlier ages had another understanding such as that of the Jains. The universe overall may be ultimately entropic, but the introduction of the transcendental object creates negentropic memes that also have the capacity to disseminate themselves across space and time. This is the definition of a "dharma age."

The concurrence between the Atthaka and Parayana vaggas and the nikayas, which constitute the next stratum of development in the Rhys Davids/Law chronology, is remarkable, showing the care with which the originators of these texts assimilated earlier material. The development of the Pali Canon is not haphazard, accidental, or arbitrary, and we see many of the same tropes that we have identified repeated and expanded in subsequent suttas. From this perspective we may regard the Pali Canon itself as a continuous meditation on the original teachings of the Buddha. There also appear to be many similarities between these ideas and those of the legendary Laozi in the Tao Te Ching, a book that must be earlier than the oldest known text which has been dated to about 300 BCE. According to tradition these teachings go back to the 6th century BCE. Thus, even though the Buddha may or may not have been influenced by this text specifically, it is possible that he was influenced by the same pan-Himalayan wisdom centre[15] that the compilers of the Tao Te Ching drew

[15] Centred on the sacred Kunlun Mountains in eastern Tibet. According to Tibetan tradition Bon came from Laozi.

on as well. In this context the speculation that the Buddha was of mixed race and non-Aryan, suggesting the possibility of a Mongol or even Chinese influence on Buddhism, is fascinating. Taoist tradition makes Laozi and the Buddha contemporaries, which need not be historically factual to allude to a symbolic truth.

The Atthaka and Parayana vaggas present a comprehensive worldview, including theories of knowledge, salvation, the nature of being, the universe, the Buddha, and ethics, remarkably similar to recent developments in modern philosophy and quantum physics, including the centrality of the act of observation (reality of consciousness), wave-particle duality (the trans-dual), and quantum entanglement (interdependent origination). The Buddha rejected sectarianism, dogmatism, and intolerance, affirmed the primacy of consciousness and the value of the human individual, saw the central problem of human beings as their ignorance of the nature of reality, and called upon us as individuals to wake up and to take personal responsibility for the implications of our thoughts, words, and actions; we must each save ourselves through radical self-realization. In particular, the Buddha articulated the mechanics of ethics – the Law of Karma – whereas Western philosophy has fallen into ethical nihilism in the wake of Nietzsche's "death of God." The Buddha saw that religion, with its exoteric reliance on dogmas, rites, and rituals, completely fails to solve the human problem.

Unlike the poetic mysticism of the Tao Te Ching, with which the Atthaka and Parayana vaggas exhibit many other affinities, the Buddha expounds a rational spirituality that is articulate, profound, clear, and explicit yet leads beyond rationality and mysticism alike to direct experiential realization. Against those who would like to eliminate rational inquiry altogether, the Buddha spent the last 45 years of his life engaging in question and answer sessions with all those who came to him seeking answers. Not merely a mystic, he was also a philosopher and a political and ethical activist, though he disdained argument and debate and realized that reason leads beyond itself to something greater. Thus he criticized, realized, and transcended religion, both in his person and in his teachings.

I am now reading Hajime Nakamura's astonishingly erudite chronological survey of Indian Buddhism, in which he summarizes the characteristics of "Original Buddhism" as follows:[16]

- Buddhism lacked a specialized technical vocabulary, and derived its terms from the Ajivaka and Jain religions.
- Dogmatism was avoided in favour of a generally skeptical attitude.
- Most Buddhist recluses lived alone in solitude, as hermits, in huts thatched with straw, although some monastics lived together with their fellow ascetics. Buddhist hermit recluses were referred to as "rishis," not bhikkus.
- Buddhist hermit recluses practised meditation by stilling the mind in woods, forests, and caves, including graveyards.
- Buddhist nuns did not exist (but did by 300 BCE).
- The rules of discipline (patimokkha) were very simple, addressing primarily diet, clothing, and dwellings, as well as basic moral injunctions like not stealing, not lying, universal friendliness, and overcoming anger, arrogance, and pleasant and unpleasant feelings.
- The Buddha was regarded as an excellent person, but not deified.
- Buddhism was both the teaching of how to become a buddha, and what the buddhas (plural) taught.
- Shakyamuni (Siddattha Gotama, the historical Buddha) was not the only buddha, and Buddhism is not only the teaching of the historical Buddha so-called.
- All excellent Buddhist ascetics were called "buddhas." Therefore, anyone could, in principle, become a buddha.
- There were Buddhist orders that did not accept Shakyamuni, including that of Devadatta, which survived until the 4th century (another authority says 7th century). The latter were known as "Gotamaka" Buddhists.
- Perhaps surprisingly, many of these doctrines are compatible with later Buddhism, including syncretism; non-sectarianism; ecumenism; the anti-monastic mahasiddha tradition; the Shaivite tradition of meditating in graveyards; the rejection of an elaborate Vinaya; the emphasis on compassion or "universal friendliness" (metta); the belief that the attainment of Buddhahood is in principle

[16] Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism,* 57ff.

available to all; the belief in many buddhas past, present, and future; de-emphasizing the historical Buddha; and the belief in multiple Buddhist lineages and traditions. Thus, the doctrines of Original Buddhism strengthen rather than weaken the claim of the Mahayana to represent the authentic dharma, even when considered historically, contrary to the claims of Theravadin dogmatists. It also shows the polemical bias of the Pali Canon. The Buddha must have had successors who were also capable of interpreting the dharma, or Buddhism has no utility and is moot.

POSTSCRIPT

I have also compiled an alternative list of items from several sources, which might be regarded as the oldest Buddhist scriptures, more or less (none of which can be said to correspond to the words of the historical Buddha, however).

- **Acchariyabbhuta Sutta (MN 123):** Likely late 5th century BCE, as some sources suggest it may not be among the earliest teachings.
- **Admonition to Rahula (Ambalatthikarahulovada) (MN 61):** Likely 5th century BCE, but possibly composed earlier, reflecting teachings contemporaneous with the Buddha.
- **Anagata Sutta (AN 5.77):** Likely late 5th century BCE, as some scholars argue for a later composition than earlier suttas.
- **Anapanasati Sutta (MN 118):** 4th–3rd century BCE range, acknowledging its systematic presentation of meditation.
- **Anattalakkhana Sutta (SN 22.59):** Likely 5th century BCE, emphasizing its importance in conveying the doctrine of non-self.
- **Ariyapariyesana Sutta (MN 26):** Likely early 5th century BCE, encapsulating the Buddha's quest for enlightenment.
- **Ariyavamsa Sutta (AN 4.28):** Likely 3rd century BCE, as some scholars view it as a later addition.
- **Ariyavasa Sutta (AN 10.19):** Potentially late 4th century BCE, given its themes.
- **Atthakavagga (Sn 4):** Likely pre-3rd century BCE, aligning with its status as part of the oldest layers of the Sutta Nipata.
- **Atthavasa Vagga (AN 2.28):** Likely 5th century BCE, reflecting early ethical teachings.

- **Brahmajala Sutta (DN 1):** Likely 5th century BCE, with debates about its exact dating.
- **Cula-Malunkyovada Sutta (MN 63):** Late 4th to early 3rd century BCE, with its teachings often seen as later than the core doctrines.
- **Cula-Saccaka Sutta (MN 35):** Likely mid-5th century BCE.
- **Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta (SN 56.11):** Likely late 5th century BCE; recognized as a pivotal discourse.
- **Dhammapada (KN):** Likely compiled around the 3rd century BCE, but reflecting much earlier oral traditions.
- **The Excellence of the Discipline (Vinaya reference):** Likely 5th century BCE, as it refers to early monastic regulations.
- **Future Fears (EA; AN 5.77):** Likely late 5th century BCE.
- **Itivuttaka (KN):** Likely around the 3rd century BCE.
- **Kalama Sutta (AN 3.65):** Likely late 4th century BCE.
- **Khaggavisana Sutta (Sn 1.3):** Likely early 5th century BCE.
- **Khanda Sutta (SN 22.48):** Likely early 5th century BCE.
- **Khuddakapatha (KN):** Pre-3rd century BCE, reflecting earlier oral compositions.
- **Lineage of the Noble One (EA; AN 4.28):** Likely late 4th century BCE.
- **Mahapadana Sutta (DN 14):** Likely 5th century BCE, but with later additions.
- **Mahaparinibbana Sutta (DN 16):** Likely shortly after the Buddha's death, possibly late 5th century BCE.
- **Mahasaccaka Sutta (MN 36):** Likely late 5th century BCE.
- **Mahasatipatthana Sutta (DN 22):** Likely mid-5th century BCE, highlighting mindfulness practices.
- **Mangala Sutta (Sn 2.4):** Likely early 5th century BCE.
- **Muni Sutta (Sn 2.12):** Likely 5th century BCE.
- **Parayanavagga (except prologue) (Sn 5):** Pre-3rd century BCE.
- **Patimokkha (V):** Likely 5th century BCE.
- **Questions of Upatisa (EA):** Likely late 5th century BCE.
- **Rahulavada Sutta (MN 62):** Likely 5th century BCE.
- **Sagathavagga (SN 1):** Likely 5th century BCE.
- **Sakkapanha Sutta (DN 21):** Likely late 4th century BCE.
- **Samannaphala Sutta (DN 2):** Likely early 5th century BCE.
- **Sariputta Sutta (Sn 4.16):** Likely early 5th century BCE.

- **Satipatthana Sutta (MN 10):** Likely 4th century BCE, reflecting systematic teachings on mindfulness.
- **Sigalaka Sutta (DN 31):** Likely late 5th century BCE.
- **Sikkhapada (V):** Likely 5th century BCE.
- **Sīlas (V):** Likely 5th century BCE.
- **Sutta Nipata, including the Rhinoceros Sutta, the Octet Chapter (Atthaka Vagga), and the Chapter on the Way to the Beyond (Parayana Vagga) (KN):** Likely pre-3rd century BCE oral compositions.
- **Tathagata Sutta (SN 22.86):** Likely late 4th century BCE.
- **Theragatha (KN) and Therigatha (KN):** Likely pre-3rd century BCE, reflecting earlier oral compositions.
- **Verses of the Sage (EA; Sn 1.1):** Likely 5th century BCE.

2
The Early Buddhist Schools

THE EIGHTEEN SCHOOLS

Even before he passed, the question of how best to preserve the dharma of the Buddha was already being debated. One group wanted to enshrine the Buddha's teachings in a kind of formalized textual transmission similar to the Vedas, but the Buddha declared that the teachings should be transmitted in the common language of the people.[17] The Pali Canon shows that Ananda was consciously memorizing the Buddha's talks, and there is even evidence of a power struggle that emerged in the wake of the death of the Buddha's two chief disciples, Sariputta, the disciple foremost in wisdom, and Moggallana, the disciple foremost in psychic powers, who was brutally murdered (it is not clear whether his killers were rival monastics or robbers). The Buddha himself had been the object of an abortive murder attempt by his cousin Devadatta, who thought that the rules of the sangha were too lax, an accusation that dogged the Buddha throughout his life. Toward the end of his life the Buddha seems to be dissatisfied with the sangha, and when Ananda suggested that he appoint a successor, the Buddha refused to do so, stating that the dharma itself should be the leader and the teacher of the sangha after his passing (parinirvana).

[17] This is the prevailing modern interpretation. However, some scholars interpret the Pali in the opposite sense. See Cullavagga (V. V 33.1-3; Horner, vol. III).

After the parinirvana, a faction arose within the Buddhist order (sangha) declaring that now that the Buddha was gone, the monastics could do what they pleased. At least this is the Theravadin interpretation. However, since the Buddha himself said that the minor rules of the Vinaya might be abolished after his death, this may also be a politicized account by conservative monastics who were attached to the rules of the Vinaya and a more liberal group who wanted to institute a more liberal Vinaya based on the Buddha's statement. In any case, Mahakassapa, the disciple foremost in asceticism, convened a meeting of the sangha at which all of the rules of the Vinaya were upheld, including apparently intentionally discriminatory rules for female monastics.[18] Whether this was due to Mahakassapa himself is unclear, since Mahakassapa had declared that the number of monastic rules is inversely proportional to the spiritual development of the sangha, implying that the rules are in fact a symptom of degeneration and not the reverse (this is the opposite of the common view today that the Vinaya rules themselves are a sort of spiritual training). This view also corresponds to the historical development of the sangha. Nonetheless, the First Buddhist Council instituted a rigorous Vinaya that was also explicitly misogynistic and which led ultimately to the disappearance of the female monastic order, the bhikkhunisangha.[19] All of this can be documented in the Pali Canon.

The Buddha emphasized the importance of the ideological unity of the Buddhist community and to this end he established rules by which future Buddhist teachings might be evaluated as well as a legal requirement of consensus or, failing that, majority rule in the context of respect for elders. This is set out in the Vinaya itself. Of course, sustaining such a democratic structure as the sangha expanded and diversified became increasingly

[18] Many modern scholars doubt the story that Ananda had to convince the Buddha to admit women to the sangha based on his reluctance to ordain his stepmother, Mahapajapati, based on contrary evidence in the canon that a nun's order (bhikkunisangha) already existed when Mahapajapati presented herself to the Buddha. The account also makes no "theological" sense, since it implies that the Buddha was irresolute and did not know his own mind. The overall evidence of the canon is that the Buddha did not discriminate against women and ordained women on an equal basis with men. It is, however, possible that the Buddha delayed creating the bhikkunisangha for a time due to social prejudice.

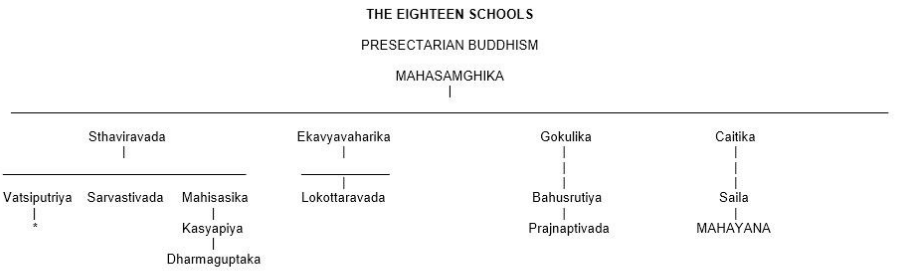
[19] The eight "heavy rules" (garudhammas) for nuns include inconsistent textual references that indicate that they were not instituted by the Buddha, including references to a probationer ordination that did not exist at the time of Mahapajapati's purported ordination.

difficult in a time when travel and communication were difficult to impossible. The sangha was actually unified for only about a century. During the Second Buddhist Council, a minority reformist group of conservative elders advocated a new arrangement of the rules of the Vinaya, which included new rules – something that the Buddha himself expressly forbade – and when unsuccessful they broke away from the majority Mahasamghikas to found the Sthavira nikaya. Thus, the first schism was not a matter of doctrine but of monastic discipline and organization.

The next 300 years saw the emergence of numerous schools and sects, many geographically based, splitting off from the original two, traditionally referred to as the Eighteen Schools. Different authorities present different lists of these schools, often referring to the same or similar schools by different names, including the Sri Lankan Dipavamsa (3rd–4th cent. CE); Mahavamsa (5th cent. CE); the Samayobhedo Paracana Cakra, a Sarvastavadin work attributed to Vasumitra; Vinitadeva, a Mulasarvastivadin monastic of the 7th–8th centuries CE; the Sariputrapariprichha, a Mahasamghikan history; and various Chinese Mahayana sutras. Here I have utilized a list based on noted University of Toronto Buddhologist A.K. Warder in chapters 8 and 9 of his book *Indian Buddhism,* consisting of eighteen schools presented in approximate chronological order. Interestingly, he says that this list of eighteen schools corresponds to the status quo ca. 50 BCE, the approximate date when the texts of the Pali Canon were first committed to writing and the beginning of the emergence of the Mahayana literature as a distinct genre, beginning with the Prajnaparamita literature of the 1st century BCE. However, whereas Warder simply discusses these schools as they arise in his book, with numerous side references and repetitions, I have organized them into a chart to make the derivation of the schools clear, in the context of the progressive development of the early schools of Buddhism for the 350-year period from ca. 400 BCE to ca. 50 BCE.

Keep in mind too that although I will allude to the Mahayana, none of these schools is Mahayanist. They are in fact all "Hinayana" schools, although of course that term is not appreciated by everyone, for which reason I refer collectively to the term "the Eighteen Schools" in my book, *Conversations with the Buddha,* instead of using the terms hinayana or sravakayana. After discussing the schools, I will conclude with some interesting implications and observations.

As with all Buddhist scholarship, opinions vary. In general, I have followed Warder and sought to effect a broad synthesis wherever possible.



1. Mahasamghika ("Great Assembly")

The Mahasamghika school, also known as the "Great Congregation," was one of the early Buddhist sects that emerged in India during the 4th century BCE, shortly after the passing of the Buddha. It is now generally accepted as the original majority Buddhist school, possessing the oldest extant Vinaya, from which the Sthavira minority eventually split during the Second (or some say Third) Buddhist Council.[20] The *Mahasamghika Sariputrapariprccha* provides the earliest account of this schism, indicating the school's origins in Magadha.

Key characteristics of the Mahasamghika school included:

- **Doctrinal Views**: The Mahasamghikas held certain doctrinal positions that distinguished them from other early Buddhist schools. They emphasized the transcendence of the Buddha, asserting that he was beyond the reach of ordinary perception and understanding. The Mahasamghikas viewed the Buddha's body and mind as supermundane and perfectly pure, existing transcendentally beyond the world. This concept laid the groundwork for the Mahayana idea of a supermundane, transcendent Buddha, as the Mahasamghikas saw the Buddha's body, power, and life as unlimited, omniscient, and immortal.

[20] Andrew Skilton, *Concise History of Buddhism*, 48.

- **Vinaya (Monastic Discipline)**: The Mahasamghikas had unique interpretations of monastic rules (Vinaya), which they believed were essential for maintaining the purity and integrity of the monastic community. This group opposed adding new rules to the Vinaya and may have denied the infallibility of the arhants.
- **Organizational Structure**: The Mahasamghika school was characterized by its decentralized organizational structure, allowing for a degree of autonomy among its monastic communities. Over time, the school split into various sub-schools and sects, such as the Lokottaravada, Ekavyavaharika, Sannagarika, and Vatsiputriya, each developing its own interpretations and doctrines.

The Mahasamghikas also proposed an idealistic ontology and buddhology that later became central to Mahayana thought. They suggested that everything – absolute and conditioned, nirvana and samsara, mundane and supermundane – is a mental projection, nominal and insubstantial. Their focus on the true or interior meaning of the sutras as the source and centre of the dharma may have led them to reject the canonical authority of the Abhidharma. Additionally, they believed that a bodhisattva could intentionally be born in lower states of existence to benefit inferior beings, expound the dharma, and awaken the factors of enlightenment in these beings. The influence of the Mahasamghika school persisted through its doctrinal and organizational contributions to the broader development of Buddhist traditions. The Ajanta, Ellora, and Karla caves are associated with the Mahasamghika. A Chinese text identifies the Mahasamghikas as wearing yellow robes embroidered with the endless knot or conch, symbols of oneness and dharma, respectively. The *Samayabhedoparacanacakra* attributes forty-eight special theses to the Mahasamghika and its derivative schools, underscoring their unique place in the history of Buddhism.

2. Sthaviravada ("Teaching of the Elders")

The Sthaviravada school, also known as the "Teaching of the Elders," was an early Buddhist sect that emerged from the Mahasamghika tradition around the 3rd century BCE. This school represents the conservative wing of early Buddhism, advocating for a stricter adherence to additional rules and a closer preservation of the original teachings as taught by the Buddha. The Sthaviras split from the larger Mahasamghika group, which adhered to what they believed were the original, fewer monastic rules. Historically, the Sthaviravada school was sometimes considered the

original Buddhist school, from which the Mahasamghika split due to a desire for more laxity in matters of discipline. However, recent Vinaya studies suggest that the Mahasamghika Vinaya is the oldest, indicating that it was the Sthavira conservative minority who split from the more liberal Mahasamghika majority at the Second Buddhist Council. The Mahasamghikas refused to add new rules to the Vinaya, which the Buddha had forbidden.

Key characteristics of the Sthaviravada school included:

- **Adherence to Teachings**: The Sthaviravada school is known for its emphasis on the teachings preserved by the elder monks (Sthaviras) and its focus on maintaining the monastic discipline (Vinaya) as taught by the Buddha. This conservative approach to Buddhist scriptures and doctrines aimed to preserve the original teachings as closely as possible.
- **Vinaya Rules**: The split was driven by disagreements over additional rules that the Sthaviras wished to enforce, including prohibitions against storing salt in a horn, eating after midday, eating more than one meal per day, holding different uposatha ceremonies in the same district, carrying out official acts without a quorum, following one's teacher's practices in preference to those of the larger sangha, eating sour milk after midday, consuming unfermented wine, using a rug of the wrong size or type, and using money. Disputes over the status and infallibility of arhants also contributed to the crisis.
- **Historical Spread and Influence**: The Sthaviravada school spread throughout India and eventually became one of the predominant Buddhist traditions in Sri Lanka, Southeast Asia, and other regions. It played a crucial role in preserving and transmitting early Buddhist texts, including the Tripitaka (the three baskets of Buddhist scriptures: Vinaya, Sutta, and Abhidhamma).

The Sthaviravada school continued to evolve over the centuries and remains influential today as Theravada Buddhism, the most widely practised form of Buddhism in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, and Cambodia.

3. Vatsiputriya ("Personalism")

The Vatsiputriya school, also known as the Pudgalavada or Vatsiputriya-Mahasamghika school, was an early Buddhist sect that emerged from the Mahasamghika tradition around the 3rd century BCE. It is named after Vatsiputra, who is considered its founder or an influential figure.

The Vatsiputriya school is known for its distinctive doctrinal positions within the broader Mahasamghika tradition. One notable aspect of their teachings was their stance on the nature of arhants (enlightened beings) and their relationship to the Buddha. The Vatsiputriyas held the view that arhants are inferior to the Buddha and lack certain qualities that the Buddha possesses.

This doctrinal position on the status of arhants caused controversy and led to the Vatsiputriya school being considered a separate branch within the Mahasamghika tradition. It reflects their unique interpretation of early Buddhist teachings on enlightenment and spiritual attainment.

The Vatsiputriya school gradually declined over time, with its teachings either merging into other Buddhist schools or disappearing altogether. Detailed historical information about the specific doctrines and practices of the Vatsiputriya school is limited due to the paucity of surviving texts and historical records.

The Vatsiputriya split off from the Sthavira tradition in the 3rd century BCE. As the most unorthodox early Buddhist school, the Vatsiputriya posited an ineffable person or individuality that is neither the same as nor different from the five aggregates. The person is the basis of rebirth, the subject of karma, and continues to exist in nirvana. Although the school was popular, it encountered significant monastic resistance, as many believed that the doctrine of the person was too similar to the Indian concept of atman (self or soul), the existence of which the Buddha denied.

4. Dharmottariya

The Dharmottariya school was an early Buddhist sect that emerged from the Mahasamghika tradition around the 3rd century BCE. This school is named after its founder or prominent teacher, Dharmottara.

The Dharmottariya school is not extensively documented in historical records, and specific details about its doctrines and practices are limited. Like other early Buddhist schools that originated from the Mahasamghika tradition, the Dharmottariya school likely emphasized certain

interpretations of monastic rules (Vinaya) and held distinctive doctrinal positions within the broader spectrum of early Buddhist thought.

As with many other early Buddhist schools, the Dharmottariya tradition gradually declined over time, with its teachings either merging into other Buddhist schools or disappearing altogether. Due to the lack of surviving texts or detailed historical accounts, further specifics about the Dharmottariya school are not widely available.

5. Bhadrayaniya ("Bhadra's School")

The Bhadrayaniya school was an early Buddhist sect that emerged from the Mahasamghika tradition around the 3rd century BCE. Named after its founder, Bhadrayaniya, this school is one of the lesser-known branches of early Buddhism, and specific details about its doctrines and practices are limited.

The Bhadrayaniya school, like other sects that originated from the Mahasamghika tradition, likely emphasized certain interpretations of monastic rules (Vinaya) and held distinctive doctrinal positions within the broader spectrum of early Buddhist thought. According to Warder, the Bhadrayaniya school appears to have split from the Vatsiputriya tradition, along with other schools such as the Sammitiya and the Sannagarika, during the 2nd century BCE. They were reportedly centred in the Aparanta region on the coast of Maharashtra, at the great port of Surparaka, which served as the capital.

The doctrines of the Bhadrayaniya school are thought to be similar to those of the Mahasamghikas, from whom they derived. However, as with many early Buddhist schools, the Bhadrayaniya tradition gradually declined over time, with its teachings either merging into other Buddhist schools or disappearing altogether. Due to the scarcity of surviving texts and detailed historical accounts, little more is known about the specifics of this school's teachings and practices.

6. Sammitiya ("Doctrine of the Sammitiyas")

The Sammitiya school was an early Buddhist sect that emerged from the Mahasamghika tradition around the 3rd century BCE. This school is known for its particular views on monastic discipline (Vinaya) and certain doctrinal positions.

One of the distinctive features of the Sammitiya school was its emphasis on a specific set of rules within the Vinaya known as the "Sammitiya Bhikkhu Vibhanga." This collection of rules included regulations

governing the conduct and discipline of monks, which were considered essential for maintaining the purity and integrity of the monastic community.

Doctrinally, the Sammitiya school held views aligned with the broader Mahasamghika tradition, including certain interpretations of Buddhist teachings that distinguished them from other early Buddhist schools.

The Sammitiya split from the Vatsiputriya school within the Sthavira tradition. According to Buddhologist Étienne Lamotte, the Sammitiya was the largest non-Mahayana sect in India. They affirmed the reality of the person and were reputed to be extremely narrow-minded and intensely anti-Mahayana, going as far as destroying texts and statues of the Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhist schools.

As with many other early Buddhist sects, detailed historical information about the Sammitiya school is limited, and its specific teachings and practices gradually merged into or influenced other Buddhist traditions over time.

7. Sannagarika

The Sannagarika school, also known as the Sannagarika-Mahisasaka school, was an early Buddhist sect that emerged from the Mahasamghika tradition around the 3rd century BCE. This school is sometimes associated with the Mahisasaka school due to their shared origins and doctrinal similarities.

Historical records on the Sannagarika school are sparse, and specific details about its doctrines and practices are limited. Like other early Buddhist schools that originated from the Mahasamghika tradition, the Sannagarika-Mahisasaka school likely emphasized particular interpretations of monastic rules (Vinaya) and developed distinctive doctrinal positions within the broader landscape of early Buddhist thought.

Over time, as with many early Buddhist schools, the Sannagarika tradition gradually declined, with its teachings either merging into other Buddhist schools or fading away altogether.

8. Sarvastivada ("Doctrine that All Exists")

The Sarvastivada school was an influential early Buddhist sect that emerged around the 3rd century BCE, primarily originating from the Sthavira (Theravada) tradition. The name "Sarvastivada" is derived from the Sanskrit term Sarvastivada, meaning "doctrine that all exists."

Key characteristics of the Sarvastivada school included:

- **Doctrinal Views**: The Sarvastivadins held a distinctive view on the nature of existence and time, particularly their belief in the existence of all phenomena (dharmas) across past, present, and future. This position is often referred to as the "Sarvastivada theory of momentariness," which posits that all phenomena exist in a momentary state, even though they appear as continuous over time.
- **Abhidharma Literature**: The Sarvastivada school is known for its comprehensive systematization of Buddhist teachings, particularly through its development of Abhidharma literature, which analyzed and categorized various aspects of Buddhist doctrine and psychology in detail.

Historically, the Sarvastivada school spread widely across ancient India and Central Asia, significantly influencing the development of Buddhist thought and practice. Its teachings were transmitted to East Asia, where they contributed to the formation of early Chinese Buddhist schools and the establishment of monastic communities.

The Sarvastivada school split from the Sthavira tradition between the reign of Ashoka and the 1st century CE. The name of the school alludes to its principal doctrine that past, present, and future coexist – a concept that has seen renewed interest in the context of modern physics. The school flourished in Kashmir and Gandhara, with the Sarvastivadin canon composed in Sanskrit.

The Sarvastivadins believed in a radical pluralism that denies the reality of a self as a substance or soul but affirms the reality of momentary entities called dharmas. The Sarvastivada posited seventy-five distinct dharmas, which were seen as final, indivisible, and real. They distinguished between conditioned and unconditioned dharmas, with conditioned dharmas encompassing matter, consciousness, psychological processes, and qualities, and unconditioned dharmas including space and nirvana.

The Sarvastivadins held that conditioned dharmas have always existed and alternate between latent states of potentiality and actual states of manifestation. It follows that everything exists together in a simultaneous past-present-future state. The Sarvastivadins also emphasized the importance of body, speech, and mind, as well as the role of Maitreya, the Future Buddha. They accepted the reality of the intermediate or “bardo” state between life and death. The figure of forty-nine days, which is found

in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead,* also appears in the Sarvastivadin view of the post-mortem state.

However, like many early Buddhist schools, the Sarvastivada school gradually declined in India and eventually disappeared as a distinct sect. Its doctrinal positions and texts were preserved and studied in other Buddhist traditions, particularly in Tibetan Buddhism, where they continued to have significant influence.

9. Mahisasaka ("School of the Buffalo")

The Mahisasaka school, also known as the Mahasamghika-Mahisasaka school, was an early Buddhist sect that emerged around the 3rd century BCE, originating from the Mahasamghika tradition. The name "Mahisasaka" is derived from the term Mahisa, which means "buffalo," possibly indicating an association with a particular geographical or cultural origin.

Key characteristics of the Mahisasaka school included:

- **Doctrinal Views**: The Mahisasaka school held distinctive views on the nature of arhants and the Buddha, differing in some respects from other early Buddhist schools. They denied the existence of the past and future but affirmed the reality of the present moment. They also denied the intermediate state (bardo) but affirmed the survival of a subtle mode of the five aggregates that continues and constitutes the basis for the next rebirth. Additionally, they affirmed that the Buddha is a member of the sangha.
- **Vinaya (Monastic Discipline)**: The Mahisasaka school emphasized certain aspects of the Vinaya (monastic discipline), which distinguished them from other early Buddhist schools.

Historically, the Mahisasaka school was influential in various regions of ancient India and had a significant presence in early Buddhist communities. However, like many other early Buddhist schools, detailed information about its specific teachings and practices is limited due to the gradual decline and absorption of its traditions into broader Buddhist movements over time.

10. Kasyapiya ("Followers of Kasyapa")

The Kasyapiya school, also known as the Kasyapiya-Mahisasaka school, was an early Buddhist sect that emerged from the Mahasamghika tradition

around the 3rd century BCE. This school is named after its reputed founder, Kasyapa.

The Kasyapiya school was known for its unique interpretations of Buddhist doctrines and its distinctive monastic rules. Like other Mahasamghika-derived schools, the Kasyapiyas emphasized certain doctrinal positions that distinguished them from other early Buddhist schools, particularly in matters related to Vinaya (monastic discipline) and interpretations of Buddhist teachings.

However, detailed historical records about the specific doctrines and practices of the Kasyapiya school are limited. As with many early Buddhist schools, the Kasyapiya tradition gradually declined, with its teachings being absorbed into other Buddhist schools or movements over time.

The Kasyapiyas were also known as the Haimavata, named after the Himavant country where they originated. Derived from the Sthaviravada tradition in the 2nd century BCE, the Kasyapiya school survived until the 7th century. According to a Chinese source, Kasyapiya monks wore magnolia-colored robes. The school expanded as far south as Sri Lanka, where they founded the Mahavihara (Great Abode) in Anuradhapura, the capital of Sri Lanka.

Doctrinally, the Kasyapiyas held that an arhant is not perfect, aligning them closely with the Sarvastivada and Dharmaguptaka schools. Their teachings included beliefs in the existence of past karmas that have yet to bear fruit, the reality of the present moment, and the existence of some aspects of the future. They also posited that all compounded things are destroyed instantly, with the cause of compounded things existing in the past and the cause of uncompounded things existing in the future.

According to Vasumitra, the Kasyapiyas were an eclectic school, sharing doctrines from both the Sthavira and Mahasamghika traditions.

11. Dharmaguptaka ("Followers of Dharmagupta")

The Dharmaguptaka school, also known as the "Adherents of Dharmagupta," was an early Buddhist sect that emerged around the 3rd century BCE, likely originating from the Mahasamghika tradition. The Dharmaguptaka school played a significant role in the spread of Buddhism across Central and East Asia, particularly flourishing in regions like Central Asia, China, and Korea.

Key characteristics of the Dharmaguptaka school included:

- **Vinaya (Monastic Discipline)**: The Dharmaguptaka school placed great importance on the purity of monastic discipline and the proper transmission of the Buddha's teachings. The Dharmaguptaka Vinaya is known for its detailed regulations and remains one of the major Vinaya traditions preserved in East Asian Buddhism.
- **Doctrinal Views**: The Dharmaguptaka school shared commonalities with other early Buddhist schools while also maintaining distinct interpretations of various teachings. Notably, they believed that a gift given to the Buddha is more meritorious than one given to the sangha because the Buddha is self-ordained. They also held that the first three characteristics of compounded things (origination, maturation, and decay) are conditioned, while the fourth, extinction, is unconditioned. Additionally, they taught that the path of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas differs from that of the disciples (sravakas), and that non-Buddhists cannot obtain the five kinds of superknowledge. The Dharmaguptakas asserted that the body of an arhant is free from taints and that offerings made to a stupa accrue great merit. They also recognized the Four Noble Truths in their entirety and were associated with some of the Prajnaparamita literature.

The Dharmaguptaka school split from the Mahisasaka tradition between the late third and early first centuries BCE, with its origins traced to the Aparanta region. An old centre of the Dharmaguptaka was the Swat Valley, also known as Uddiyana, reputed to be the home of Padmasambhava. The school flourished in northwest India during the 1st century and became particularly known for its efforts to spread Buddhism beyond India, reaching as far as Iran, Central Asia, and China. The Dharmaguptaka Vinaya became the foundation of Chinese Buddhism and is still practiced in East Asia today. Scriptural evidence suggests that the Dharmaguptaka tradition continued to exist into the 7th century.

The Dharmaguptaka also had two extra-canonical divisions: the Bodhisattva Pitaka, a collection of bodhisattva doctrines and practices, and the Mantra Pitaka, a collection of mantras. Their influence extended across different cultural and geographical contexts, significantly shaping the development of Buddhist traditions, particularly in East Asia, where they contributed to the formation of early Chinese Buddhist schools and the establishment of monastic communities.

12. Ekavyariharika ("Those Who Make a Single Utterance")

The Ekavyavaharika school was an early Buddhist sect that emerged around the 1st century BCE. The name Ekavyavaharika is derived from Sanskrit and can be understood as "those who use a single convention" or "those who make a single utterance." The school is particularly known for its doctrinal stance on the non-duality of ultimate truth (paramartha-satya) and conventional truth (samvriti-satya), suggesting that they are fundamentally not separate entities.

Key characteristics of the Ekavyavaharika school included:

- **Non-duality of Truths:** The Ekavyavaharika emphasized that ultimate reality and conventional truths are non-dual (ekavyavaharika), meaning that they do not contradict each other at the deepest level. This perspective influenced broader Buddhist discussions on the nature of reality and the relationship between ultimate and conventional truths.
- **Doctrinal Views:** The school held that all principles are cognized in a single instant, and that the Buddha speaks with a single, unified, and transcendental meaning. They believed that sentient beings are endowed with a fundamentally and originally pure mind, which is essentially the same as that of the Buddha but has become obscured by suffering.

The Ekavyavaharika school is believed to have split from the Mahasamghika tradition during the reign of Ashoka (3rd century BCE) and accepted the Mahayana sutras as the word of the Buddha. They played a role in influencing later Mahayana thought, particularly in terms of the unity of conventional and ultimate realities.

Like many early Buddhist schools, the Ekavyavaharika eventually declined and its teachings were absorbed into other Buddhist traditions over time.

13. Lokottaravada ("Teaching of Transcendence")

The Lokottaravada school, also known as the "Teaching of Transcendence" or the "Transcendentalist" school, was an early Buddhist sect that emerged from the Mahasamghika tradition around the 1st century BCE. The name "Lokottaravada" is derived from the Sanskrit term Lokottara, meaning "transcendental" or "supermundane," reflecting the

school's emphasis on the transcendental qualities of the Buddha and arhants (enlightened beings).

The Lokottaravada school is distinguished by its doctrinal positions, which held that the Buddha and arhants possessed qualities beyond conventional understanding. The school emphasized the superiority of the Buddha over all other beings, asserting that the Buddha's actions, while appearing conventional, were transcendental and did not reflect any real need. For example, according to the Lokottaravada, Buddhas never experience fatigue, even though they may lie down; no dust can stick to them, although they wash their feet; and they remain in a continuous state of meditation.

The Lokottaravada school made significant contributions to Buddhist thought, particularly through its unorthodox Vinaya text, the *Mahavastu*. The *Mahavastu,* which collected all the biographical traditions of the Buddha for the first time, portrayed the Buddha as entirely transcendent, including his body. The school's influence extended into the Mahayana tradition, where some of its ideas were incorporated and further elaborated upon.

The Lokottaravadins believed that all phenomena are mental constructions with merely provisional reality, teaching a distinctive doctrine that only two things are real: the emptiness of self and the emptiness of phenomena, known as the "twofold view of emptiness." They also taught that the Buddha articulated all of his teachings in a single, transcendental utterance. Additionally, the Lokottaravada recognized the existence of innumerable pure lands with innumerable buddhas and tenth-stage bodhisattvas, and they believed that the future Buddha, Maitreya, would be one of 1,000 buddhas to appear in the current age.

The Lokottaravada school likely arose out of the Ekavyavaharika tradition sometime after 200 BCE and was centred in north-central or northwest India. The school continued to flourish up until the time of the Turkish conquest of the Pala Empire. The Lokottaravada school's teachings, particularly as articulated in the Mahavastu, strongly influenced later Buddhist texts, including the Infinite Life Sutra, which shares many elements in common with Lokottaravada thought.

Like many early Buddhist schools, the Lokottaravada gradually declined and eventually merged into other Buddhist traditions over time.

14. Gokulika ("Pastoral School")

The Gokulika school, also known as "Cinder" or by various other names such as Kukkutika, Kukkulika, Kaukkutika, and Kaurukullaka, was an early Buddhist sect that emerged around the 2nd century BCE as part of the Mahasamghika tradition. The name "Gokulika" is derived from the term gokula, meaning "cowherd" or "cowpen," possibly reflecting their rural or pastoral origins.

The Gokulika monks were known for their simpler monastic lifestyle compared to other Buddhist sects and were organized into small, autonomous groups rather than centralized monastic establishments. This decentralized structure distinguished them from other Buddhist communities.

Doctrinally, the Gokulika school is not extensively documented, but they were noted for their emphasis on abhidharma, which involved rigorous logical analysis. According to the Sthaviravadins, the Gokulikas believed that there is no true happiness. Bhavaviveka notes that they held the view that thought is intrinsically pure and radiant, and cannot be defiled, and that at enlightenment, all principles are cognized in a single moment. They also maintained that all principles are merely labels or conceptual constructs.

Unlike the Lokottaravada and Ekavyavaharika schools, with which they are otherwise associated, the Gokulikas did not accept the Mahayana sutras as the word of the Buddha. They remained centred in Varanasi and had a presence in Pataliputra.

The Gokulika school split from the Mahasamgha in the third or late 2nd century BCE and continued to flourish until the time of the Turkish conquest of the Pala Empire. Taranatha, a Tibetan historian, suggests they were active from the fourth to the ninth centuries.

As with many early Buddhist schools, the Gokulika tradition eventually declined, and its teachings were assimilated into other Buddhist schools or traditions over time, contributing to the rich diversity of early Buddhist thought.

15. Bahusrutiya ("The Great Learning")

The Bahusrutiya school, also known as "The Great Learning," was an early Buddhist sect that emerged from the Mahasamghika tradition around the 1st century BCE. The school is mentioned in Buddhist texts such as the *Samayabhedoparacanacakra* and is known for its particular

emphasis on the role of extensive learning and study (bahusruta) in the practice of Buddhism.

The Bahusrutiya school placed great importance on the deep understanding and knowledge of Buddhist scriptures (sutras) and teachings. They believed that through extensive learning and study, practitioners could achieve profound insights and realization of the Dharma. The Bahusrutiya split from the Gokulika school over a point of abhidharma in the 3rd century BCE and were active in regions such as Kosala, Gandhara, Andhra, and northwest India.

A monk named Yajnavalkya, who held as a special doctrine that meditation could prolong life indefinitely, is traditionally credited with founding the Bahusrutiya school. The school taught that all experiences are suffering and that all principles, with the sole exception of nirvana, are false. However, they asserted that the five aggregates and suffering itself are ultimately real. These aggregates are impermanent, not-self, and empty, with even the thought of emptiness ceasing in nirvana.

The Bahusrutiya school distinguished between ultimate and concealed truths. According to Vasumitra, they believed that the Buddha had a transcendental teaching with the power to generate the way, summed up in five words: impermanence, suffering, emptiness, not-self, and nirvana. Everything else he taught was considered worldly or mundane.

The great Buddhist poet Asvaghosa was probably a follower of the Bahusrutiya school, according to Warder. The *Tattvasiddhisastra* (3rd century CE) summarizes the Bahusrutiya abhidharma, which included beliefs in the nonexistence of past and future principles and actions, the inherent impurity of thought, the nonexistence of the person, the reality of "unmanifest materiality," and the nonreality of an intermediate post-mortem state or bardo. The Bahusrutiya school adopted a middle position between the extremes that "everything exists" and "nothing exists," and their abhidharma is considered closest to the Sthaviranikaya and Sautrantika schools.

However, like many other early Buddhist schools, the Bahusrutiya school eventually declined over time, with its teachings either merging into other Buddhist traditions or disappearing altogether.

16. Prajnaptivada ("Doctrine of Designations")

The Prajnaptivada school, also known as the "Teachings of Designations" or the School of Designations, was an early Buddhist sect that emerged in India around the 1st century BCE. It was a branch of the

Mahasamghika tradition, originating from the split that occurred during the Second Buddhist Council.

The Prajnaptivadins were known for their philosophical stance on language and perception. They emphasized the concept of "prajnapti" (designation or designation-only), holding that all phenomena are mere designations or conceptual constructs without intrinsic reality. This view contrasted with other Buddhist schools, such as the Sarvastivadins, which emphasized the ultimate reality of phenomena.

The Prajnaptivada school contributed significantly to the development of Buddhist thought, particularly influencing later Mahayana and Yogacara philosophies with their theories on the nature of language, perception, and reality. The school split from the Bahusrutiya in the 3rd century BCE, led by Mahakatyayana, over the "two truths doctrine," which asserts that real, ultimate principles should be distinguished from merely imputed, provisional, conceptual, superficial, or apparent words, names, or labels.

The Prajnaptivada school taught that reality is trans-linguistic and that phenomena are the products of conceptualization. Because all phenomena are mere concepts or notions, they are inherently linked to suffering. The Prajnaptivadins believed in two levels of statements in the sutras: ultimate and concealing. Therefore, they viewed the teachings of the Buddha as nominal, conventional, and causal, with all teachings being provisional and incapable of containing ultimate truth.

Notably, the school held that suffering is ultimately real, while the Noble Eightfold Path is eternal, immutable, and cannot be lost or destroyed. However, they believed that the path could not be cultivated through contemplation alone but required wisdom and merit. Everything, according to the Prajnaptivada school, is the result of merit and karma.

The Prajnaptivada school arose and remained in the Himalayan regions, particularly in northeast India, Bengal, and Nepal, and it continued to flourish in the Pala Empire up until the time of the Turkish conquest. There is evidence that the famous Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna was influenced by the doctrines of this school.

However, like many other early Buddhist schools, the Prajnaptivada eventually declined, with its specific teachings being integrated into broader Buddhist traditions over time.

17. Caitika ("School of the Shrines")

The Caitika school, also known as the Caitika-Vibhajjavada school, was an early Buddhist sect that emerged around the 1st century BCE. A branch of the Mahasamghika tradition, the Caitika school diverged from the main Mahasamghika group during the Second Buddhist Council. The Caitikas were known for their distinct doctrinal positions, particularly concerning the nature of arhants and the status of the Buddha.

One of the most distinctive features of the Caitika school was its adherence to the concept of an "eternal Buddha," a view that was controversial and led to their separation from other Buddhist schools. The word caitya means "shrine," and the Caitika, also referred to as the Caitiya, Chaitya, or Caityaka school, is believed to have split from the Mahasamgha under the leadership of a successor to the original Mahadeva in the Andhra region, corresponding to the modern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh. In Pali texts, they are also known as the Andhaka.

The Caitikas are thought to have flourished from the 2nd century BCE to the early 2nd century CE. Some scholars believe that the Prajnaparamita literature arose out of the Caitikas, which would place them no later than the 1st century BCE. Their split from the Mahasamgha was reportedly over a legal point of Vinaya concerning admission to the sangha. The Caitikas are also associated with the rise of the Mahayana tradition in this region.

Doctrinally, the Caitikas revived the original Five Points of Mahadeva and held that the discourse of the Buddha is inherently transcendental, ultimate, and supermundane, beyond words, although some may only perceive the conventional or mundane meaning. They believed that the power of the Buddha or his disciples enabled them to effect whatever they wished, even against the laws of nature, including performing miracles. The Caitikas also held that the Bodhisattva could be born in unfortunate circumstances, such as a hell-being, animal, ghost, or demon, of his own free will rather than as the result of karma. They considered the path of the Bodhisattva to be superior to that of the arhant, whom they believed to be fallible and inferior.

The Caitikas are associated with the inception of the tathagatagarbha doctrine and seemed to believe in the prescriptive truth of the *Jataka* stories. According to the Sarvastivadins, the Caitikas split from the Bahusrutiya school. They were custodians of the Great Stupa of Sanchi and appear to have been associated with the Ajanta Caves, particularly Cave 10.

Over time, the Caitika school declined and eventually disappeared, with its doctrinal positions being absorbed into other Buddhist traditions.

18. Saila ("Mountain School")

The Saila school, also known as the Sthavira-Saila school, was an early Buddhist sect that emerged around the 2nd century BCE. It was part of the broader Sthavira (Theravada) tradition, which had split from the Mahasamghika school during the Second Buddhist Council. The Saila school is noted for its strict adherence to the Vinaya (monastic discipline) and its doctrinal positions within the broader framework of early Buddhism.

The Saila school was divided into two subgroups: the Apara Sailas and the Uttara (or Purva) Sailas, both of which split from the Caitika school. One of their distinctive doctrines was the belief that the Bodhisattva is born with the certainty of attaining enlightenment.

Over time, the Saila school eventually merged with other Sthavira groups, contributing to the development of what is now known as Theravada Buddhism.

THE FIVE POINTS OF MAHADEVA

Mahadeva is a somewhat mysterious figure who, according to the Theravadin account, declared Five Points about 35 years after the Second Buddhist Council, ca. 265 BCE. However, some modern scholars have suggested that Mahadeva was actually the founder of the Caitaka school about 200 years later, i.e., in the 1st century BCE. Although the historicity of this account is somewhat controversial, there is no doubt that the Five Points refer to an important controversy to do with the perfection of arhants on which the schools were thoroughly divided. These points or theses were:

- Male arhants can have nocturnal emissions.
- Arhants can be ignorant.
- Arhants can doubt.
- Arhants need guidance.
- Arhants may attain the path by means of a verbal ejaculation [sic].

The gist of the first four of these points is that arhants are imperfect and fallible and therefore cannot represent the highest stage of the Buddhist

path. As we have seen, the schools were divided on this question, including several Sthavira schools. The oldest Sthavira school to hold this view of the imperfection and fallibility of arhants was the Sarvastivada. The Sarvastivada also criticized the Mahisasaka view concerning the inferiority of women. In both of these respects, the Sarvastivada exhibits similarities to the Mahasamghika school, despite being a school in the Sthavira line. Warder dates the secession of the Sarvastivada from the Sthavira during the reign of Ashoka (3rd century BCE).

VIEWS ON ARHANTS

One of the most interesting things that emerges out of the foregoing discussion is the position of the early schools (all pre-Mahayana, remember) on the status of arhants. We are accustomed to think of arhantship as the ultimate goal of the Buddhist path, based on the Pali Canon, the only surviving complete early Buddhist canon, preserved by the Theravada school, yet the picture appears very differently when we catalog the positions of the early Buddhist schools on this question.

The Sarvastivada, Kasyapiya, Dharmaguptaka, Mahasamghika, Ekavyavaharika, Lokottaravada, Bahusrutiya, Pajnaptivada, and the Caitika schools all regarded arhants as imperfect in their spiritual attainment compared to buddhas and therefore fallible, despite being emancipated. I think that this ambiguity or paradox has to do with the doctrine of Interdependent Origination (paticcasamuppada), as I have explained elsewhere,[21] as well as the historical fact of the primogeniture of the Buddha. Significantly, three of these schools fall under the conservative Sthavira, the same school with which the Theravadins

[21] To recap, the chain of "interdependent origination" (paticca + sam + uppada) includes two links (nidanas), craving (tanha) and ignorance (avijja), which are subject to intention, thus two points where the chain can be broken, resulting in liberation. Contact comes at the approximate midpoint of the chain, resulting from feeling and giving rise to clinging (desirous attachment), and is reversed through the practice of dispassion. Ignorance is the first link and therefore the root or "first cause" of the chain, resulting from birth, ageing, suffering, and death (interpreting the diagram as a cycle or "circle") and giving rise to "constructive activities" (sankharas), and is reversed through the practice of wisdom, which is both the beginning and the goal of the path (Right View). Wisdom or gnosis is the essential salvific principle, from which dispassion automatically follows. Interestingly, these two accomplishments, dispassion and wisdom, correspond exactly to the two stages of emancipation, the arhant and the Buddha respectively, with the Buddha preeminent due to the singular role of ignorance in the chain, which we see reflected in the primogeniture of the Buddha and the dependence of the arhants upon him.

identify themselves. Even the Mahisasakas – another Sthavira school – also appeared to believe that women could become arhants, but not buddhas, implying that arhantship is inferior to buddhahood. Clearly, there was no consensus on this point. We are accustomed to thinking of the arhant as the ultimate goal of the Buddhist path, although the Pali Canon itself clearly considers Buddhahood to lie beyond arhantship, because this is the view of the Theravadins. This view of the inferiority of the stage of arhantship was also held by the Jains.

The Buddha also prescribed different spiritual strategies for different people, based on their personal predilections and stages of development, including intentional rebirth, deva rebirth, and rebirth in the Brahma worlds, which are clearly not the highest goal according to the Buddha. There is even an arhant rebirth (in the Pure Abodes). The metta or meditation on compassion, which is often mentioned throughout the Pali Canon, by itself does not seem to lead to arhantship. As we have shown, the Theravadin claim to be identical with presectarian or original Buddhism is historically false.[22] On the other hand, the doctrine, associated with Mahadeva, that arhants are imperfect and fallible explains certain difficulties with the arhant concept in the Pali Canon, including the fact that it is a non-Buddhist concept generally (but not universally) associated with an intermediate samana stage (e.g. by the Jains) and the Buddha's statement and the evidence of the Pali Canon that it could be achieved relatively easily, in as short a time as one week, which seems an awfully short time to achieve the complete transcendent self-perfection that the Buddha took eons to attain, even with the aid of the Buddhavacana.

THE DOCTRINES OF THE MAHASAMGHIKAS

When Martin Luther decided to challenge the dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church in November 1517 he summarized his "disputation" in ninety-five theses, which he nailed to the front door of the All Saints Church in Wittenberg. Similarly, the Doctrines of the Different Schools

[22] This is also the view of the *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism,* s.v. Theravada: "The denotation of the term Theravada is fraught with controversy. ... As a term of self-designation for a major branch of Buddhism Theravada does not come into common use until the early 20th century.... Theravada is neither synonymous with early Buddhism, nor a more pristine form of the religion prior to the rise of the Mahayana." Buswell and Lopez, op. cit., 904.

(Samayabhedoparacanacakra) of Vasumitra records forty-eight special theses attributed to the Mahasamghika, Ekavyavaharika, Lokottaravada, and the Goulka schools. Vasumitra was a monastic who led the Fourth Buddhist Council in Kashmir about the 2nd century and helped to compile the Great Commentary of the Abhidhamma. Whether this is the same Vasumitra who wrote the Doctrines of the Different Schools is unclear. The book exists in English translation under the title *Origins and Doctrines of the Early Indian Buddhist Schools.*

Some key points associated with the Mahasamghika school, which might be included in the Forty-Eight Theses, are:

- **Transcendental Nature of the Buddha:** The Mahasamghikas believed that the Buddha was a transcendental being who transcended ordinary human limitations. They held that the Buddha's body was not subject to the usual laws of physical matter and that his actions were always motivated by pure compassion.
- **Multiple Buddhas:** The Mahasamghikas supported the idea of multiple Buddhas existing in different worlds or realms simultaneously, rather than there being only one Buddha at a time.
- **Doctrine of Emptiness (Shunyata):** The Mahasamghikas emphasized the concept of emptiness, which later became central to the Mahayana tradition. They believed that all phenomena are empty of inherent existence.
- **Bodhisattva Ideal:** They placed a strong emphasis on the bodhisattva path, which focuses on the aspiration to attain buddhahood for the benefit of all beings, rather than merely seeking personal liberation (arhantship).
- **Non-dual Nature of Reality:** The Mahasamghikas might have advanced views on the non-dual nature of reality, which aligns with later Mahayana philosophies that deny the distinction between samsara (the cycle of birth and death) and nirvana (liberation).

THERAVADIN CLAIM TO HISTORICAL PRIMACY

The oldest reliable historical accounts situate the origin of the Theravada – the "doctrine of the elders" – in Sri Lanka about 200 BCE, 200 years after the parinirvana.[23] According to tradition they were founded by Mahinda, the son (or brother) of Ashoka, who became a Buddhist

[23] 344 years if one accepts the traditional Theravadin date of the parinibbana of 544 BCE.

monastic. Originally, they were called the Tamraparniya, "the Sri Lankan lineage." Warder does not include either the Tamraparniya or the Theravada in his list of the eighteen original schools. Warder does not refer to either of these schools in his book, *Indian Buddhism.* Disputes concerning doctrine and practice caused the school to divide into three sub-schools, the Mahavihara, Abhayagirivihara, and the Jatavanavihara, each of which was named after its associated monastery. These schools were reunited in the 12th century by the Sri Lankan king, under the guidance of two forest monastics of the Mahavihara school. Thus, Theravada Buddhism became associated with nationalism.

The Tamraparniya/Theravada is an offshoot of the Vibhajyavada school, which derived from the Sthavira minority that split off from the Mahasamghikas, through six intermediate schools. As I have already explained, this schism was illegal under Buddhist ecclesiastical law and thus all subsequent developments were also illegal. The Theravadins clearly have no direct succession from original or pre-sectarian Buddhism, contrary to their dogmatic claim to represent the original teachings of the Buddha. Moreover, the term "Theravada" did not come into use before the 4th century of the common era, when it was used in the Dipavamsa to designate the national spiritual heritage of Sri Lanka. According to a Chinese source, Mahayana Buddhism was also practised in Sri Lanka in the 7th century. The Mahayanists were associated with the Abhayagiri monastery, whereas the "Hinayana" Buddhists were centred on the Mahavihara monastery. As I have mentioned, Sri Lankan Buddhism itself was not unified until the 12th century. Theravada doctrine was codified by Buddhaghosa in the 5th century of the common era. Thus, the Theravada is one of the latest of the so-called "early" schools.

Theravadins consider buddhas and arahants to have reached the same level of spiritual development; thus, arhants must be perfect and infallible. As I have shown, this view was by no means universally accepted by the early schools. Since the arhants of the First Buddhist Council and the Pali Canon itself are clearly extremely misogynistic, this commits modern Theravadins to the view that women are spiritually inferior to men, a position still held in Thailand. The bhikkunisangha died out in Sri Lanka during the 13th century. Some scholars (e.g., Melford Spiro, *Buddhism and Society*) consider Theravada Buddhism to be a composite of many separate traditions, overlapping but still distinct. The Theravadin Vinaya, with 227 rules for monks and 311 for nuns, both enshrines the misogyny of

the First Buddhist Council and preserves a larger number of rules than the Mahasamghika, for which reason the Mahasamghika Vinaya is considered the oldest Vinaya extant (the original Vinaya is believed to consist of only 152 rules). According to Mahakassapa, a larger number of rules indicates degeneracy, not spiritual superiority, contrary to popular thinking today, which also corresponds to the historical account of the Pali Canon.

According to Ajahn Sucitto, a British-born Theravada Buddhist monastic,

> It wasn't originally a counterpoise to Mahayana, although it became subsequently defined, and has defined itself, as such. In fact, the terms 'Mahayana' came into being around the first century, long before the term 'Theravada' was applied to a 'school' of Buddhism. The German scholar, Hermann Oldenberg referred to 'Theravada' to describe the Pali Vinaya texts he was translating – and published in 1879, but it wasn't until the early years of the twentieth-century that the term 'Theravada' was employed (by the English bhikkhu, Ven. Ananda Metteyya) to describe the Buddhists of Sri Lanka, Burma and S.E. Asia. Even then the term was not officially used in the Asian homelands until the gathering of the World Fellowship of Buddhists in Colombo in 1950.

Theravada Buddhism has been characterized by a series of collapses and revivals. Each time, the tradition became more consolidated, which of course also implies a loss of diversity. This phenomenon of simplification over time is well-known to students of hermeneutics. According to Ajahn Sucitto, the Sri Lankan sangha disappeared during the 18th century and had to be revived from Thailand. This is the oldest lineage in Sri Lanka today – a mere 300 years old.

David Chapman, in his essay, "Theravada Reinvents Meditation," notes that

> in the early 1800s, vipassana had been completely, or almost completely, lost in the Theravada world. Either no one, or perhaps only a handful of people, knew how to do it. Vipassana was reinvented by four people in the late 1800s and early 1900s. They started with descriptions of meditation in scripture. Those were vague and contradictory, so the inventors tried out different things that seemed like they might be what the texts were talking about, to see if they worked. They each came up with different methods. Since then, extensive innovation in Theravada meditation has continued. Advocates of different methods disagree, often harshly, about which is correct....

> In the mid-1800s, these texts were revered because supposedly they showed the way to nirvana. However, the way they were practised was for groups of monks to ritually chant the text in unison. This is like a bunch of people who don't know what a computer is reading the manual out loud, hoping the machine will spring to life, without realizing you need to plug it in....
>
> In the 1880s, there is no evidence that anyone in Sri Lanka knew how to meditate. One biography of [Anagarika] Dharmapala [a Sri Lankan Buddhist revivalist and writer] says flatly that "the practice had been neglected and then forgotten." It's possible that there were a few monks somewhere who still practised vipassana, but there is no evidence for that. We do know that he travelled extensively in Sri Lanka, and "in spite of all his enquiries he never succeeded in finding even a single person, whether monk or layman, who could instruct him in... meditation practices."

Chapman makes two further points that are of interest here:

- Asian Theravada repeatedly reinvented meditation under the influence of Western ideas.
- Men who were "into" extreme asceticism, which the Buddha expressly forbade, reinvented Theravada meditation. This fascination with asceticism continues in Theravada today, which (it is quite clear) has unfortunately also become associated with religious fascism, especially in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Thailand.

APPENDIX

Since writing the foregoing Hajime Nakamura's exceptionally valuable book, *Indian Buddhism,* has come to my attention, including his summaries of Original and Early Buddhism.[24] Although Nakamura gives no specific dates, Original Buddhism may be identified with pre-sectarian Buddhism, whereas Early Buddhism may be identified with the Early Buddhist Schools, say, after the Second Buddhist Council ca. 300 BCE to Ashoka's death ca. 232 BCE . Here I will summarize his material on Early Buddhism to complement the foregoing. This is the most accurate and succinct synopsis I know of.

[24] Nakamura, op. cit., 57–82.

DOCTRINE

- Metaphysical questions were forbidden.
- The Buddha had no desire to compete polemically with other sects.
- There is a concept of "meaninglessness statement" (nippapanca) in the Pali nikayas. These are questions or discussions that do not lead to enlightenment or the cessation of suffering and are therefore dismissed by the Buddha as unworthy of pursuit. The concept is related to the idea that certain metaphysical questions or speculative views can distract from the practical path of mindfulness and ethical living.
- The first problem Buddhism took up was suffering, defined as "things not working as one wants them to."
- Buddhism was empiricist.
- Nothing is permanent. There is no permanent metaphysical substrate. All things are temporary existences that are changing always. [My note: This is an extraordinary insight that presages process philosophy, which did not come into its full flowering until the 20th century (e.g., Whitehead, Bergson, Hartshorne, etc.)].
- The doctrine of non-self – the attitude of not assuming anything as Self except one's Self – eliminates selfish desires. It is enlightenment itself. Buddhism did not deny the Self as such. Paradoxically, Buddhism aimed at establishing existential subjectivity or individuality by the negation of the ego. The realization of the True Self was striven for. The practice of Buddhism can be interpreted as the formation of the True Self.[25]
- Atman is often referred to with – compared to – light, as in the early Upanishads.
- Buddhism assumed the reality of transmigration. The existence of the subject of transmigration was assumed. [My note: despite the apparent desire by some so-called modern or Western Buddhists to discard the theory of rebirth.]

[25] "Early Buddhists believed that by the attitude of not assuming anything except one's Self as Self, one could get over sufferings. Paradoxically speaking, Buddhism aimed at establishing the existential subjectivity or individuality by the negation of the ego. The realization of the true Self was striven for. Buddhism did not deny the self as such, contrary to the general assumption by many scholars who tend to regard the theory of Non-Self as a sort of nihilism" (Nakamura, *Indian Buddhism,* 63f.). Cf. Gurdjieff.

- Dharma is the fundamental conception of Buddhism. The Buddha sees dharma. Dharma denotes a norm and whatever is regulated by the norm. Dharma replaces the Upanishadic concept of Brahman. Even defilements were regarded as dharmas.
- Human existence was divided into corporeality (matter or its attributes), feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness. The ego is nowhere found.
- The problem of the subconscious was very important. Nakamura compares it to depth psychology (Jung).
- The Four Noble Truths represented the first systematized teaching.

PRACTICE

- The practical implication of the Four Noble Truths is the Middle Way or the Noble Eightfold Path, which begins with seeing the dharma (Right View).
- The Middle Way is the basis of ethics, which avoids attachment to the extremes of asceticism or hedonism. [My note: Here we see the root of the doctrine of non-duality or trans-duality.] The basis of Buddhist ethics was universal compassion or benevolence (metta). Buddhism held that the value of moral conduct can be determined by the motive (intentionality) of the actor [My note: as distinct from the Jain emphasis on action].
- Various formulas of Interdependent Origination appear in the early Buddhist scriptures. The interdependence between discriminative consciousness and volitional activities is the basic nexus of all subject-object relationships. It reveals the inner working of the mind, through which conversion from ignorance to enlightenment becomes possible. The twelve-link formula resembles Samkhya-Yoga and Jainism. The essential purport of the theory is causality (the law of karma). Sickness is inherent in human existence.
- Ignorance is fundamental, but can be annulled by knowledge or cognition, resulting in enlightenment.
- The concept of bodhicitta appears in Pali as annacitta ("the thought of gnosis, the intention of gaining arhantshp").
- Nirvana is absolute nothingness and perfect peace. The distinction between nirvana and parinirvana came later. The concept of void is a key point for early Buddhism. Deliverance is freedom.

- Early Buddhists refrained from defining ultimate reality. Everything is provisional.
- Buddhist doctrine was not systematic. The teaching and method of teaching, including the use of parables and similes oriented to lay people, differed according to the mental ability of the individuals addressed.
- Buddhist cosmology was systematized gradually.
- Buddhism held the idea of three evil realms of hells, hungry ghosts, and animals, but there was no concept of eternal damnation.
- Mahayana ideas, including void, consciousness, and thought (cittamatra) are found in the Pali scriptures.
- Early Buddhism was not closely organized.
- The leader of Buddhism was not always regarded as Gotama. E.g., the Jains regarded Sariputta, who emphasized compassion and opposed severe austerity, as the leader of Buddhism.
- The early sangha existed by the 2nd century BCE. Buddhist nuns existed by 300 BCE, earlier than Jainism.
- The original Vinaya consisted of 152 rules, regarded as a sort of education. The Vinaya for nuns came later.
- Early Buddhism advocated the equality of men and women.
- Early Buddhist monastics lived alone, simply, in remote dwellings, and avoided worldly entanglements.
- There were many solitary ascetics in early Buddhism, called paccekabuddhas (as in Jainism). They lived in forests, caves, deserted places, and hermitages, and practised meditation, consisting of various kinds of jhanas and samadhis. Monastics recited sacred phrases in ceremonies as a form of meditation [My note: mantra yoga]. The goal of meditation was nirvana, defined as mental stillness and understanding things as they are, including the fundamental impurity of the body (meditation on the body as a corpse). Mystical powers were ascribed to advanced monastics, but magical practices were strictly forbidden. The primary samadhi was meditation on the Buddha.
- Monastics wore three yellowish-red robes, a common colour of samanas' robes at the time.
- Buddhism repudiated animal sacrifice.

- There were only Four Precepts originally. The consumption of alcohol was added later. Buddhists did not prohibit meat eating. Onions were also prohibited.
- Some scriptures asserted that lay people or householders could attain arhantship/nirvana, but the question was controversial.
- Circumambulation was practised [My note: cf. walking meditation.]
- Lay practice focused on giving alms, observing precepts and expecting to be reborn in a divine world or higher dimension ("heaven"), especially by means of altruistic philanthropy. Altruistic philanthropy directed to holy people was especially efficacious. Donation of things and properties was practised by lay people and monastics (?). [My note: How, if they were vowed to poverty?]
- Diseases could be cured by medicine, sometimes in combination with "magical formulas" [My note: mantra yoga again.]. It was also believed that diseases could be cured by the Buddha's mercy or meditation on the Buddha.
- Buddhism originally had no gods. Nagas were regarded as demigods, part serpent and part god.
- Some monastics rebelled against the discipline of the Buddha and even defied the authority of Gotama. [My note: Thus it appears there were competing groups of Buddhists. See also my summary of Original Buddhism, Point 11.

3
The Pali Canon Phenomenon

"Start with the universe." Bucky Fuller

The Pali Canon is the term used to describe a set of texts published in Pali between 1871 and 1956. There are five editions of the Pali Canon extant, including the first Burmese Edition (1900, 38 vols.) Pali Text Society Edition (1877–1927, 57 volumes), Thai Edition (1925–1928, 45 vols.), the Sixth Buddhist Council Edition (1954–1956, 40 vols.), and the Sinhalese Edition (1957–1993, 58 vols.). The Sixth Buddhist Council Edition, called the Chattha Sangayana, is available online at www.tipitaka.org. Thanks to the efforts of the Pali Text Society and others, almost all of the Pali Canon is now available in English translations ranging from fair to good, both in print and online. A new, truly critical edition of the Pali Canon is in the early stages of preparation in Wat Phra Dhammakaya, north of Bangkok. When finished, it should supersede through incorporation all of the previous versions of the Pali Canon. The Pali Canon will be truly restored to its theoretical singularity. However, will that event constitute the manifestation of the ekayana – true, universal dharma? It was not lost on the redactors of the Sixth Buddhist Council Edition that their project would culminate in 1956, which according to their calendar marked the 2,500th year of the Buddhist era. In fact, 2100 is closer to the year 2500 BE.

A modern critical edition of the Pali Canon did not exist prior to 1900, about 2,300 years after the death of the Siddattha Gotama, the Buddha. Nevertheless, very few if any scholars doubt the antiquity of the modern text, based on the demonstrable antiquity of the Pali language and

comparative study of texts similar or identical to texts in the Pali Canon in other ancient canons, especially the Chinese and Tibetan canons, and other traditions, especially the Sarvastivadin tradition, a fragmentary or partial collection of which was discovered recently in Afghanistan. The Pali Canon is a text of the Sthavirivada school, from which the Theravada claims to derive. It is, therefore, a sectarian collection though it includes a substantial number of pre-sectarian texts too.

There is no reason to contest the traditional statement that the original Pali Canon was written down on palm leaves during the 1st century before the Common Era, about 300 years after the death of the Buddha in about 400 BCE. This latest consensus date came out of the Gottingen symposium, the results of which were published in *The Dating of the Historical Buddha* by the Gottingen Academy of Sciences in 1991 and 1992. Only the first two of a projected three volumes have been published. The range of dates for the death of the Buddha that is now increasingly given is between 410 and 370 BCE, supplanting the older date of 487 to 483 BCE, which in turn supplanted still older dates, going back (according to some) as far back as 2420 BCE. This is a good thing for the Pali Canon. According to the Theravadin view, the Buddha passed in 544 BCE and the Pali Canon was first written down in the 1st century BCE, about 500 years after the death of the Buddha. The new date means that the Pali Canon may have been written down as early as 300 years after the death of the Buddha.

The interval between the death of the Buddha and the approximate final form of the Pali Canon may even be smaller than this. Many scholars accept the view that the Canon achieved its approximate final form prior to the reign of Ashoka, who is nowhere alluded to, which would put the Canon prior to Ashoka's conversion to Buddhism about 260 BCE, a mere 140 years after the death of the Buddha, just about the time of the Great Schism. For comparison, the Buddha predicted the future rise and fall of the city of Pataliputra (modern Patna) in the last year of his life, according to the Pali Canon. The Buddha's prophecy refers to the rise of the Mauryan empire in 322 BCE. Barring actual prescience, these considerations broadly place the date of the Pali Canon between 322 BCE and 260 BCE. The Great Schism occurred during the Second Buddhist Council when the elder Sthaviras, the ancestors of the Theravadins, split from the majority Mahasamghikas over a disagreement on Vinaya. I am vastly oversimplifying because the Pali Canon is not a singular text but a collection of texts, some parts of which are certainly older and some parts

of which are certainly more recent than the range of dates I have suggested.

It is clear from internal evidence that the Canon was edited, revised, and copied over hundreds of years. Thus, it is a heterogeneous cocktail of a text, riven by differences of details but characterized by a broad underlying uniformity, the product of a process of such intense intellectual energy that we can only imagine. The intellectual project of the Pali Canon is extraordinary, truly a wonder of the world. In the early days, changes or elucidations were probably made to clarify differences of doctrine, whereas as time passed the nature of the changes probably became more editorial in character. Thus, the Canon would have gradually congealed into stasis over time. The Canon itself indicates the conservatism and seriousness with which the task of preserving the dharma teachings was taken, as it still is today. To regard it as something that just "appeared" more or less spontaneously and effortlessly, perhaps due to guile, is surely a mistake. We must believe that there is an historical veracity at the core of the Canon. Nevertheless, while the Pali Canon can be said to derive from this core, nothing in the Pali Canon can be simplistically identified with it. A range of interpretations is always possible. The best approach seems to be to keep an open mind.

The Pali Canon is an aggregate of texts, some earlier, and some later. Rhys Davids classified the chronology of the Pali Canon in ten strata or stages, in which the oldest identifiable texts of the Pali Canon are the Paranavagga and the Atthakavagga, the final two chapters of the Sutta Nipata. We find these texts in the Khuddaka Nikaya, surprisingly, since the latter is generally associated with later matter. The third early text is the Pattimokkha, the rules of the sangha, although the Pali Canon alludes to a Pattimokkha of only 152 rules, compared with the 227 rules of the Pali Vinaya. This causes us to classify the Vinaya generally as a post-sutta text. The famous Rhinoceros or Khaggavisana Sutta, also in the Sutta Nipata, may be included here. These four texts, to which we can add the Four Precepts, subsequently expanded to five (pansil), are as close as we can come to the words of the historical Buddha in the Pali Canon as it exists today.

The Atthakavagga addresses such basic concerns as desire, attachment, philosophy, mindfulness, detachment, the nature of Buddhahood (referred to as the Muni, or 'Sage,' similar to the Tao Te Ching, and Bhagavat, 'Lord'), and the path. The suttas emphasize the importance of

independence and disdain philosophizing and seeking salvation through others. We must save ourselves. The Buddha opposes the doctrine of self-purification through the cultivation of inward peace to the doctrine that one is purified by the practice of philosophizing based on speculation and argument. Even at this early date, we see the Buddha celebrated and even worshipped as a descendent of the Sun, a Muni, an Isi, and a Sambuddha ('perfectly or self-enlightened'). The Buddha is said to have been reborn from the Tushita ('satisfied') heaven, associated with the bodhisattva doctrine. The Buddha is described as having the thirty-two marks of a great man and as having the psychic power of telepathy. The realm of the deities (devas), including earthbound devas and Mara, are also referred to. The path is described as both gradual and instantaneous. The Buddha prohibits some of the same superstitious practices, especially prognostication, that he criticizes in the first sutta of the Digha Nikaya, the Net of Confusion (Brahmajala Sutta). As observed by Mrs. C.A.F. Rhys Davids, asceticism is deemphasized. Pain is observed, but not sought. The liberated person is free from attachment and revulsion and sees happiness everywhere. They are friendly and tolerant to all, much like the sage of Laozi. These texts, especially the Parayanavagga, introduce the same question and answer format that structures almost all of the suttas, suggesting that this may have been the major teaching method used by the historical Buddha.

Yet even these texts cannot be identified with the historical person of Siddhattha Gotama. For one thing, the Buddha is already partly divinized. They are, rather, interpretations of the teachings of the Buddha by the immediate successors of those arhants that convened the First Buddhist Council under Mahakassapa. By definition, we do not know who was not present at that meeting, or whose potential contributions were forgotten. Ananda's significant contribution was only saved by his attaining the state of arhantship on the night before the council was set to meet. I have discussed these documents in "The Oldest Buddhist Scripture." Rather than get into dogmatic minutiae here, I want to discuss the general implications of these discoveries for our understanding of the Pali Canon and its place in the context of the Dharma Transmission to the West, the ekayana, and the whole Buddhist oeuvre, from a universal perspective.

While on this topic of chronology I would like to address a common concern that one finds cropping up constantly in discussions of what Buddhism says and means, or should say and mean, and that is the

statement that because a text is "later" than another text the later text can be disregarded. This bias seems to be based on the notion that through the application of a reductive method one can ultimately identify a hypothetical "Q" text that is therefore identical with the actual historical teaching of Siddattha Gotama (this is also based on the hidden axiom that Buddhism is restricted by or to the historical teachings of Siddhattha Gotama, an axiom that is refuted by no less a Buddhologist than Hajime Nakamura). Thus, one goes from the non-essential to the essential by a process of elimination. Unfortunately, no objective methodology on how to do this has been described and no new canon proposed based on the application of the unexplained method. Polish Buddhologist Stanislaw Schayer contests the underlying assumption of this approach, arguing that the exceptional and idiosyncratic texts that were nevertheless included in the Canon are more likely to represent the original teachings, which based on this assumption correspond more closely to the Mahayana.

The historicist, reductionist, "academicist," fundamentalist approach to the Pali Canon is really missing the point. Even if we were able to identify the exact words of the Buddha, and thus create a revised, "corrected" canon, in which only historically reliable material is included – based on the assumption that the dharma itself is historical and nothing else – the twin problems of 'meaning and praxis' (dharma-vinaya) would not disappear. Even during the Buddha's own lifetime, these problems were recognized. Even if we were able to apply an absolutely rigorous method to this "Q" text to identify with certainty what each and every word of the historically corrected Pali Canon meant in the context of the meanings of the words in other, similar sentences and in the context of the Buddha's cultural milieu, we cannot avoid the syntactic and semantic uniqueness of the sentences in which he used these words without denying the significance of the Buddhist project itself and we cannot identify what these sentences meant to the Buddha in his own interiority. We cannot identify the Buddha's "authorial intent." We can only know the Buddha's mind through knowing our own Buddha mind, thus coming full circle.

Even so, such an analysis inevitably ignores what these sentences imply and what they might mean to us, both collectively and as individuals. Even in the Pali Canon, the Buddha is represented as giving different teachings and techniques to different individuals based on their personal needs and stages of spiritual development. Thus, to infer any perfectly consistent system from an historical reconstruction of the "original" teachings of the

Buddha, himself merely one of many historically and samsarically contingent beings, is inherently paradoxical since the second half of the equation, the individual subjects themselves, is absent. Moreover, the axiom of impermanence (anicca), itself militates against any such possibility. As Kierkegaard notes, there is no repetition. While dharma itself may be supermundane, every samsaric expression of dharma is necessarily relative and contingent. Thus, there is no ultimate manifestation of dharma anywhere, but there are expressions more or less perfect based on their completeness (it does not follow, however, that these are all equal). The fundamentalist project is at its root self-contradictory and thus inevitably degenerates into religious fascism and ultimately nihilism, as we clearly see in the person of Devadatta, who also wanted to impose a maximally rigorous "Buddhism."[26]

Not all of the Pali Canon purports to represent the 'words of the Buddha' (Buddhavacana). It is clear from the compilation of the Canon that the "canonicity" of the Canon does not inhere only in its being identical with the words of Siddattha Gotama. There are also suttas and poems uttered by others, rules, formulas, precepts, catechisms, summaries, stories, commentaries, analyses, histories, and the expositions of the Abhidhamma, the third major section of the Pali Canon, which codifies the suttas and was supposed to have been taught by the Buddha to his mother in Tavatimsa, the Heaven of the Thirty-Three Gods, yet Theravadins castigate Mahayanists for holding similar views about their sutras.

The Buddha was not mainly or even at all concerned with his own person. The goal of his renunciation was not personal; it was universal. His purpose in leaving home was very specific, and it only had to do with Siddhattha insofar as he was one of many. His purpose was to discover the dharma or truth underlying the universal suffering of living and sentient beings and its cure. The Buddha had already clarified that this is what he wanted to do himself to some extent. It is in the course of this quest or search that Siddhattha Gotama discovers the praxis and thus became a buddha. It is the praxis, not the theory, which made Siddhattha a buddha. Theory also precedes praxis, as well as following from it in the form of insight.

[26] Nonetheless it appears, contrary to the Pali Canon, that Devadatta's order was successful for about 1,000 years.

Thus, our concern in trying to identify the original words of the Buddha, insofar as we can do that, is not to find out about the Buddha himself but to find out about the dharma that he sought and taught, the most generalized meaning or interpretation of which is "natural law" or simply "truth," especially the First Noble Truth of Suffering, and the praxis. These are not two things but one thing, since wisdom implies praxis and praxis implies wisdom. Thus, the Buddha said that we should make the dharma, not the Buddha or the sangha, our refuge and our teacher, and reason and experience our criteria of evaluation, not teachers or texts, including, presumably, the Buddha and Pali Canon. The Buddha deemphasized himself, and said that he was merely one of many (the lineage of Buddhas) and part of a group (the sangha). This does not, however, negate the fact of the Buddha's primogeniture. This ontological fact alone proves that the path that leads to Buddhahood, the path of the bodhisattva so-called, is not the same as the path that leads to arhantship, the path of the sravaka so-called. However, it is clear from the Pali Canon that the fundamental difference between Buddhas and arhants was clearly recognized in the early texts.

The main part of the Pali Canon that quotes the Buddha or his close disciples includes the suttas or "discourses" of the Digha Nikaya, Majjhima Nikaya, Samyutta Nikaya, Anguttara Nikaya, and Khuddaka Nikaya. In the Khuddaka Nikaya, only the Khuddakapatha (five suttas), Itivuttaka (112 suttas), and Sutta Nipata (seventy-one suttas) include actual suttas. Thus, there are approximately 5,572 suttas in total.

- Digha Nikaya: 34 suttas (521 pages)
- Majjhima Nikaya: 152 suttas (1,151 pages)
- Samyutta Nikaya: 2,889 suttas (1,888 pages)
- Anguttara Nikaya: 2,308 suttas (1,588 pages)
- Khuddakanikaya: 188 suttas (785 pages)
- Vinaya: 1 sutta (1,214 pages)

The suttas vary greatly in length, from 1,214 pages to one and a half pages. In English translation, they may be about 7,147 pages in total. This is about 3,573,500 words. When I speak, I use a rule of thumb of about 8,000 words per hour. Thus, all of the texts of the Pali Canon attributed to the Buddha, disregarding duplications of material, represents about 443 hours of speech. Since we know that the Buddha taught for 45 years, we

can say that the Pali Canon presents about ten hours of speech for each year that the Buddha taught. Yet the Pali Canon itself represents the Buddha as engaged in almost continuous dialogue with visitors and Buddhist monastics on a wide variety of topics as well as a legislator of Vinaya. It is obvious that the Pali Canon itself is only a small fraction of what the Buddha himself must have actually said. The Pali Canon says even less about praxis. Many practices are referred to but not explained, let alone described. This may indicate that the redactors of the Pali Canon were forgetting the practices or perhaps these were considered too sacrosanct to commit to writing. The Buddha alludes to something similar, when he says that the wisdom of the Buddha, "vast as the leaves of simsapa trees in a simsapa forest," vastly exceeds what he actually says. Elsewhere the Buddha is presented as being reluctant to discuss speculative matters, warning his followers against becoming mere intellectuals and debaters, while emphasizing the preeminent importance of wisdom and meditation. The Pali Canon also represents the Buddha as hesitating to teach the dharma for fear he would not be understood.

This view of "lateness" derives from the Buddhist identification of time with entropy, which is identical with the axiom of anicca or 'impermanence.' Thus, everything decays into its elements and loses its identity over time. "Even the dharma will be forgotten" is a familiar refrain. From this fear, the fundamentalist gains his motivation. Preserving the dharma from its own demise becomes a sort of bodhicitta. However, even in the context of the Buddhist worldview this axiom is inadequate because it is incomplete. Time is both entropic and negentropic. There is devolution but there is also evolution. Living systems demonstrate this and so do information systems. Information systems grow and expand, like a brain. As long as there is memory, there is progress. Thus, it is as absurd to say that a later school is ipso facto degenerate and therefore false due to the passage of time, even if not a single sentence of the teachings of that school is identical with a sentence spoken by the historical Siddhattha Gotama, as it is to say that the history of Western philosophy has no meaning or value in relation to the pre-Socratics or that quantum physics is inferior to Einsteinian relativity, which is inferior to Newtonian physics, etc. This extreme view turns out upon analysis to be incorrect. Thus, the fundamentalist project is false in its essence. In the Pali Canon, we read that the dharma wheel cannot be stopped and that it never stops rolling. However, in such a kinetic system

it is clear that the older schools will be the ones most likely to become corrupted, whereas the newer schools will represent a mixture of error and insight, devolution and evolution, depending on their conditions. Thus, the quality of the manifestations of dharma changes over time as a function of changing conditions, but it certainly does not follow logically than later = inferior, even if the original truth of Buddhism could be established.

We cannot infer anything evidential from the non-appearance of a doctrine or concept in the oldest versus the later texts simply because the survival or non-survival of the early texts is certainly fortuitous and therefore arbitrary. We can assume I think that a significant number of early texts were incorporated into later texts of the corpus, and there is evidence in the Pali Canon of suttas being spliced into other suttas. Thus, old wine may appear in new bottles. Nor can we assume that the Pali Canon corpus itself is complete and therefore exclusive for the reasons already stated. While we might infer some axiomatic meaning from the presence of a doctrine in the oldest texts of the Pali Canon – there is a functional difference between the foundation and the attic of a house – no negative connotation can be inferred concerning the truth or falsehood of a later doctrine or text, any more than any "implication" can be stated to be inferior to an "axiom." Axioms and implications have the same relationship to each other as causes and effects. For this reason when the Buddha refers to testing a new text or doctrine by reference to the established corpus he does not mean that it must be identical but rather that it must be continuous. Any other interpretation vitiates the axiom of impermanence (anicca) and is intellectually absurd.

The Buddha repeatedly implies that the application of reason to problems of religion can arrive at true conclusions "on the basis of truth," even though he admitted that ultimate meaning and emancipation itself are beyond words or reason itself. Thus the Buddha discouraged empty speculation and cautioned his followers against dogmatism and sectarianism, referring each one to the authority of their own conscience, since enlightenment, like death, is experienced by and for oneself alone. The fruits of enlightenment may be shared but in itself, it is not a collective phenomenon. It is however false to infer from this fact that wisdom is unimportant and that all that matters is practice, since the Buddha emphasized the salvific primacy of wisdom both in his statements and in

his behavior, where he spent the better part of 45 years teaching and instructing others.

Praxis without wisdom is unintelligible (as is wisdom without praxis). The Buddha made no distinction between Buddhists and non-Buddhists, rich and poor, lay and monastic, and men and women, instructing everyone who came to him openly and without prejudice, giving to each one what they needed in that moment to take the next step in their spiritual education. It is only later after the Buddha's passing that the predominantly male monastics began to make and enforce such discriminations. After the Buddha's passing, his successors established an increasingly dogmatic, authoritarian, and hierarchical organization that included systemic discrimination against women, dogmatic disputatiousness, and arguments about the practice and enforcement of the rules, culminating in the Great Schism of the Second Buddhist Council, about a hundred years later. This was followed by the disintegration into the Eighteen Schools, including disputes focused especially on the spiritual perfection and infallibility of arhants in relation to the Buddha.

Many scholars seem willing to accept the texts cited plus the Four Great Nikayas (Digha, Majjhima, Anguttara, Samyutta) as the foundation of "mainstream Buddhism," but even these texts demonstrate a significant ideological development as well as internal doctrinal differences, especially in the matter of the spiritual status of men and women, which I have discussed at length elsewhere, "The Status of Women in Ancient India and the Pali Tradition." Those who advocate the notion that later texts are necessarily and inherently corrupt fail to consider that development may also imply an original potential implication that may very well originate in the person of the Buddha himself, just as a tree originates in an original and originating "seed," even if the appearance of the mature form differs greatly from the germ, yet who says that the tree is not implicit in the seed or inferior to the seed or, even more absurdly, not the seed?

To take just one example, the Pali Canon includes a collection of Jatakas or "birth stories" attributed to the Buddha. According to the Pali Canon, the Buddha remembered many if not all of his past lives during his enlightenment experience, and throughout the course of his subsequent life, he would identify people, places, and events in his present life as Siddhattha Gotama with people, places, and events that he remembered

from past lives. The Jatakas are generally dated to the 4th century BCE. Scholars recognize that many of the stories in the Jatakas come from other languages and media, including popular oral traditions that predate the Pali compositions and are also found in Hinduism. Therefore, many academic Buddhologists and "modernist" religionists might be inclined to reject the doctrine of rebirth itself based on the historical implausibility of the Jataka tales, but does this inference follow logically from the premise? The fact that the conservative redactors of the Pali Canon included the Jatakas in the Pali Canon, along with many accounts of supernatural powers, characters, and events in the suttas, are also relevant facts. Similar considerations apply to the Mahayana literature. Questions of historicity and questions of meaning and value are not coterminous.

Another example: psychic powers. We need not believe that the Buddha actually levitated, teleported, and bilocated to accept that the Buddha demonstrated psychic powers on occasion, along with the vast host of other holy beings, both human and non-human, yet the evidence for the reality of some sort of psychic power is growing, and such powers as well as profound and powerfully transformative charisma and wisdom are commonly attributed to and demonstrated by so-called exceptional individuals throughout the human experience. This is the universal testimony of human history and Buddhism is not an exception to this. This is not surprising since the Buddha did not claim any originality for himself, but rather claimed to be restoring the ancient spiritual tradition.

A fascinating aspect of this association is the UFO phenomenon, wherein many of these powers are experienced both in the UFO contact experience itself and in its aftermath. The UFO phenomenon is fully evident in the Pali Canon (I have discussed this connection at length in "Buddhism and the UFO Phenomenon"), in accord with the historical hypothesis of Dr. Jacques Vallée in his book, *Passport to Magonia.* In view of the demonstrated physicality of at least some UFO manifestations, we should not arbitrarily reject the possibility of such powers, although the Buddha himself said that the development of such powers is not the main point or objective of his teachings. Psychic powers and the UFO phenomenon itself also manifest in the context of the psychedelic experience and visionary phenomena, which are attested in the Pali Canon.

One of the advantages of the Pali texts in relation to the founding texts of Christianity is the sheer abundance of material – 300 pages or so of

primary Christian scripture, of which only about 12,000 words represent the words of Jesus (referring to Q and *The Gospel of Thomas*), compared with about forty volumes of material in the Pali tradition, most of which consists of the words of the Buddha. Moreover, the Pali material is highly repetitive. One may hypothesize in such a situation that the tropes of the original and originating Buddhist texts were extensive and significant enough to (a) be preserved and (b) generate complex associations of meaning that led to meaningful implications that can then be refined by applying logical criteria to them. Quite simply, we know a lot more about Shakespeare because he wrote thirty-seven plays than we would know if he only wrote one. The project is then to identify the general tropes in the Canon, collate them with each other, and submit them to criticism, to arrive at the truth of dharma.

This is precisely contrary to the fundamentalist project that tries to reduce the Pali Canon to a hypothesized set of original sentences, denies the value or legitimacy of any sentences outside that set or that any unstated implications do or could exist, and identifies through intensive comparative analysis the meanings and connotations of the words and sentences as they were spoken by the Buddha in a given semantic context, approximating as far as possible to "authorial intent." That such a project is impossible in principle is proved by the axiom of impermanence (arnica). There are no "permanent truths." The truth is the middle way between dogmatic fundamentalist extremism on the one hand and subjectivism on the other. Mahayana and Hinayana need and correct each other. Without Mahayana Hinayana degenerates into arid literalism, whereas without Hinayana Mahayana degenerates into a flight of fancy. The ekayana and the Dharma Transmission to the West include them both. We find this point of view most highly developed in the schools of Tibetan Buddhism, Chan, and esoteric Buddhism, and least developed in the Theravada sect, whose orthodox adherents still uphold the view, now thoroughly discredited, that the Pali Canon represents the verbatim utterance of the Buddha, in the language spoken by the Buddha, recalled by the photographic memory of Ananda, and handed down for several hundred years by a perfect process of group recitation till it was written down on palm leaves and meticulously preserved for 1,900 years and finally printed in Burma. The scorpion of self-purification has arisen in the heart of Theravada Buddhism in the form of so-called progressive or "modern" Theravada. It ends in historical nihilism, whereas the sutras

state that after 2,400–2,500 years in the new age now dawning the dharma of the future will be personal and esoteric.

CONCLUSIONS

The Pali Canon is a sectarian collection of sectarian and pre-sectarian texts, indiscriminately worked and reworked over centuries to form a composite textual aggregate.

The core sutras of the Pali Canon were probably established by the mid-3rd century BCE, approximately a century and a half after the death of the Buddha ca. 400 BCE.

The early and later Buddhist texts represent a complementary process of preserving and clarifying the original teachings of Siddhartha Gautama, in the context of the universal dharma that he sought in relation to his special concern: the problem of universal suffering and its cure.

The Pali Canon only represents a fraction of what the Buddha said, and what the Buddha said only represents a fraction of the dharma. The original teachings of Siddhartha Gautama and the dharma are not conterminous or coextensive.

Dharma can only be ultimately understood by each individual for themselves through the exercise of reason and experience.

Devolution and development in time co-occur. The dharma itself is unconditional and omni-evolutionary, yet its samsara manifestations appear, develop, decay, and disappear and are always subject to error, flux, and change.

Every expression of dharma is conditional and relative to what each individual needs at that moment. Universal dharma can only be inferred from this by a process of collation and abstraction and can never be perfectly arrived at. Largely it is intuitive and symbolic and ultimately trans-rational, thus allowing for new insights and formulations. Dharma is multivalent and is capable of multiple forms and interpretations without contradiction.

Fundamentalism, organizationalism and authoritarianism all contradict the axiom of impermanence (anicca), since there are no permanent forms, and are thus all adharmic. They are all contrary to authentic spiritual progress and are decadent, corrupt, reactionary, devolutionary, and after 2,500 years, all historical Buddhist schools are more or less in the same boat. The whole system is stagnant. This is the mappo.

What is needed is a radical comprehensive reformation. This is the Dharma Transmission to the West.

Potentially all non-self-contradictory tropes in the Pali Canon are ultimately relatable to an original and originating trope. The task is to identify the recurrent patterns and recognize them as deriving from an original axiom, essentially expressed, identifying their implications and ultimately their praxis.

Praxis derives from theory.

"Original Buddhism" is the set of primary axioms.

The complete set of primary axioms must explicate all subsequent implications.

Some tropes that contradict the known prejudices of the conservative male monastic organizationalists who compiled the Pali Canon may have been too well known and too entrenched to be expurgated, like similar passages in the Christian New Testament, thus highlighting their interest and integrity. Anything that contradicts the status quo is less likely to have been invented.

The Buddhavacana includes dharma teachings not spoken by the Buddha. Thus, the denial of canonicity to Mahayana sutras is inconsistent. The latter may represent symbolic and visionary expressions of authentic implications of the axioms of the dharma and thus constitute authentic dharma realizations without being historically factual or spoken by the Buddha at all. Because dharma is unconditional potentiality the continuity of authentic dharma traditions, lineages, canons, suttas, sutras, and termas is infinitely extensive and diverse. Dharma is an open, not a closed, system.

Spiritual development and enlightenment imply the experience of altered states of consciousness, visionary states, meditative states, dream states, radical metaphysical and philosophical intuitions and insights, powerful affective states, and influential charismatic states, similar to all other spiritual practices and traditions. Buddhism is continuous with Aryan/Indian tradition and exists in the universal context of shamanism and the perennial philosophy, the prehistorical ground of human spirituality.

By collating all Buddhist expressions and resolving their complexities and contradictions into a coherent system of axiomatic generalizations one arrives at dharma. This is the hermeneutical method of the ekayana. This is the project of the Dharma Transmission to the West, which will

achieve its apotheosis on all planes in the historical manifestation of Shambhala, the perfected dharma society of the future.

4
The Quest for the Buddhavacana

Establishing an Intellectual-Hermeneutic Framework for Interpreting the Pali Canon

The orthodox fundamentalist view of the Pali Canon by those who look to it for the foundation of their system of spirituality, religion, and culture is that the Pali Canon is the Buddhavacana, the literal word of the historical Buddha, and that therefore the Pali language in which it is written is the literal language of Magadhi, where the Buddha lived and taught. In this scenario, the Pali words simply transcribe the dialogue of the living Buddha, preserved perfectly in the photographic memory of Ananda. Unfortunately, the texts themselves refute this view by virtue of the fact that they show signs of editing and include contradictory views and statements. The Pali Canon is the result of a process of development that did not end till 300 or 400 years after the Buddha's death or parinirvana. For one thing, it seems unlikely that the Buddha taught in numbered lists or stock paragraphs. What we have in the Pali Canon is rather a snapshot of a collective memory, taken in Sri Lanka, far away from the Buddha's homeland in northeast India, in the 1st century BCE. To adapt a metaphor used by the Buddha himself, it's a long and winding path through an ancient and forgotten forest, including many interconnecting paths and many circuitous routes, all faint and overgrown, leading to an abandoned city.

Some scholars contest the historicity of the First Buddhist Council, but it seems reasonable that the Buddha's senior disciples would have met to discuss the Buddha's teachings and decide together how to hand them down as remembered objects, like the Vedas. The problem of accurate preservation also arose during the Buddha's life. There also seems no reason to disbelieve that a conflict developed with respect to which is primary, the Vinaya or the suttas, represented by the followers of Mahakassapa on the one hand and Ananda on the other, and that the Vinaya was the popular choice based on the majority following of Mahakassapa. This led to problems in later councils, as the Vinaya followers sought to expand the number of rules despite the Buddha's injunction not to do so, and the sutta followers continued to discuss and to debate the Buddhavacana, leading to a continuous succession of edits, clarifications, and codifications in response to the pressures of oral transmission. The original "arhants" were also deeply misogynistic, and attacked Ananda for "persuading" the Buddha to allow the ordination of women – a story that many scholars believe is a forgery, since the Pali Canon itself presents evidence that nuns had been ordained from early days.

Most linguists no longer accept the simplistic identification of Magadhi and Pali, thinking instead that Pali developed as an artificial hybrid language based on a number of prakrit dialects all closely related to the original language of the Buddha but not identical with it.

Conservative Pali scholars, especially those with a religious bent, would have it that we can identify the linguistic skeins of the traces of the actual words of the historical Buddha in the approximately forty volumes of the Pali Canon by distinguishing between older and more recent patterns of linguistic expression. Pande's *Studies in the Origins of Buddhism,* is perhaps the most ambitious work in this direction, but it yields far less than a comprehensive critical philosophy of the Buddha. The distinction between earlier and later meanings of Pali terms is perhaps its most valuable contribution.

Another popular approach to Pali Canon interpretation is based on the selection of individual passages that present a certain perspective, and then arbitrarily declaring that any conflicting passages are simply perversions. These passages are recycled endlessly in the literature of popular Buddhism and somehow they have become Buddhism in the

minds of many. However, when considered as a whole and in its entirety, the worldview of the Pali Canon is far more interesting and complex.

If we regard "Buddhism" as including the implications and not limiting ourselves to the axioms of the historical Buddha, we can broaden our definition of Buddhavacana to include the totality of the Pali Canon, considered as a whole, and look for large patterns and strands of meaning that cut across the texts and are themselves meaningful. The analytical approach is incapable of interpretation on this level, and so ignores it, but the synthetic approach corresponds to the level of discourse in which the Buddha himself would have engaged in the living situation. For this reason, we may theorize that the large patterns of meaning, some of which may only be discerned from a holistic, synthetic perspective, may encode the original meanings of the Buddha precisely because they are not reducible to any particular detail, just as the meaning of a work of art or a philosophy arises out of its totality. The biography of the historical Buddha was arrived at in very much this way, but Pali scholars are not necessarily philosophers, so it is less common for this method to be applied to Buddhist ideas, especially by academicians, who are steeped in the analytical approach, and religionists, who are steeped in sectarian historical traditions. There are exceptions to every rule, of course, and the works of Peter Masefield, Hajime Nakamura, Herbert Guenther and others demonstrate just how far the synthetic approach can go. It does, however, require that one read the Pali Canon thoroughly, discarding nothing, rejecting any tendency to sectarianism from the outset.

Just as in an archaeological excavation, we know that there are strata in the development of the Pali Canon:

1. **The linguistic-cultural inheritance of the Buddha;** on the linguistic level, this refers to the Sanskrit-Pali etymologies.
2. **The actual historical discourse of the Buddha,** especially the similes and conversational speech.
3. **Creation** – collective memory of the First Buddhist Councils; who participated? Who was excluded?
4. **Preservation** – structure of the Pali suttas established as the generations organize their lives around the task of preserving the Canon; numbered lists, stereotypical phrases and stock paragraphs to standardize the content; versification.

5. **Clarification** – refining or clarifying language to eliminate ambiguities; therefore, idiosyncratic references may be more archaic than their simplifications. This is a general principle of hermeneutics. Traces of alternative systems of views (e.g., the path of wisdom versus the path of renunciation, based on ignorance and desire in the chain of cause and effect) in the Pali Canon are of special interest since they represent skeins of interpretation that arose contemporaneously with the development of the Pali Canon itself.
6. **Codification** – eliminating dissident views; tendency to orthodoxy, homogeneity. The final stage of Codification is conservatism. This level continues to the present day.

Levels 3 through 6 refer to critical stages in the development of the Pali Canon that potentially resulted in distortions of the original meaning. We also have to consider the influence of Sri Lankan culture on the editing of the Pali Canon, including the possibility of monastic distortion; the Buddha was not Sri Lankan or a monastic. By being aware of these distortions, we can adjust our perceptions as we process the text. It is a testament to the enterprise of those ancient anonymous monastics that the Pali Canon, especially the Vinaya and Sutta Pitaka, are as self-consistent as they are. The Abhidhamma is a later work of interpretation and exegesis and should be regarded as a sectarian production, since every Hinayana school had its own Abhidhamma.

It follows from the foregoing that Pali linguistics is a valuable tool to further the prime task of establishing a standard edition of the Pali Canon with a standard reference system and then begin the process of synthetic analysis and self-comparison to establish a systematic Buddhist theology. This is beginning to occur but is still in its infancy.[27]

THE EARLY BUDDHIST COUNCILS

As we discussed in the Mahaparinirvana Sutta, the Buddha set out some final teachings and in particular laid down some advice for how the sangha

[27] E.g., Bryan Levman's use of a computer to identify every incidence of the Pali word 'nirutti' in his paper, "Sakaya nirutiya revisited" (accessed Aug. 31, 2014), http://www.sareligionuoft.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Levman-sak%C4%81ya-niruttiy%C4%81.pdf.

should operate after his death. These included that the monastics should follow the Dharma-Vinaya as their Teacher in the absence of the Buddha, that the sangha should have no leader, that the minor rules of the Vinaya may be abrogated, and that decisions should be arrived at based on consensus or, failing consensus, based on majority opinion. The Buddha himself warned his followers against attachment to dogmas, and appears to have been broad-minded. He always sought consensus and was prepared to frame his discourse in terms of his audience. It appears that the Buddha passed in March/April around 400 BCE. According to tradition, the First Buddhist Council was held about three months later, at the beginning of the rainy season retreat (June/July).

FIRST BUDDHIST COUNCIL (ca. 400 BCE)

Mahakassapa

According to the Cullavagga, Mahakassapa called upon the monastics to convene the First Buddhist Council near Saptaparni Cave in Rajgir. The Buddha said that every past and future Buddha has two chief disciples and one attendant during his ministry. In the case of Shakyamuni, the pair of disciples were Sariputta and Mahamoggallana and the attendant was Ananda. Ananda was also the subject of a special panegyric by the Buddha prior to his death. It is perhaps noteworthy that Ananda was present at the death of the Buddha; Mahakassapa was not. Mahakassapa's role was said to have been prophesied when he exchanged robes with the Buddha.

Sariputta, the monk foremost in wisdom, and Mahamoggallana, the monk foremost in psychic powers (iddhis or siddhis), had already predeceased the Buddha. Mahakassapa was known as the monk foremost in asceticism. As I have discussed previously, it is quite clear from the Cullavagga that Mahakassapa called the council together with the intention of ensuring the preservation of a strict interpretation of the Vinaya, in response to what he perceived as the moral laxity of an elderly monk named Subhadda and presumably others as well.[28] Thus, the Vinaya has first place in the Pali Canon, despite the fact that the Buddha refers to

[28] The accusation of moral laxity was nothing new. It dogged Gotama throughout his life as well. First, the Group of Five accused him of moral laxity and abandoned him prior to his Enlightenment. Second, the Buddha's cousin, Devadatta, accused him of moral laxity and attempted to organize a schism. When that failed, he tried to murder the Buddha.

the Dharma-Vinaya, not the Vinaya-Dharma. There appears to have been a rivalry between the followers of Mahakassapa, who seem to have dominated the meeting, and the followers of Ananda, the Buddha's personal attendant for the final 25 years of his life, who was known as the Guardian of the Dharma. Ananda did not fare very well during this meeting. First, there was opposition to his participation due to his not having attained the level of an arhant until – somewhat suspiciously – the night before the council was due to convene. He was then attacked by the monastics, first, for encouraging the Buddha to ordain women, and, second, for neglecting to ask the Buddha to specify which rules of the Vinaya were major and which were minor. Finally, however, he recited the suttas based on his photographic memory and these became the basis of the Suttapitaka. Upali, the Buddha's barber, who subsequently founded the Vinaya School, recited the Vinaya and codified the patimokkha rules for male and female monastics, including eight special rules for the nuns, which were designed to ensure that the nuns remained subordinate to the monks and made it more difficult to become a nun and easier to be disrobed. The latter led to the disappearance of the bhikkhunisangha in many Buddhist lands or even their non-establishment in countries like Tibet and Thailand. Thailand, which prides itself on its conservatism, prohibits female ordination to this day. I have discussed this at some length in "The Status of Women in Ancient India and the Pali Tradition."

SAPTAPARNI CAVE

The First Buddhist Council, which we might refer to as Mahakassapa's Council, violated every one of the strictures of the Buddha as given in the Mahaparinirvana Sutta. Mahakassapa acted very much as the leader of the sangha, and in fact is still referred to as the Father of the Sangha. It seems that this council was very much a council of Mahakassapa and his group, although they finally allowed Ananda to participate. Rather than simplify the Vinaya as the Buddha instructed, Mahakassapa established the rules as indelible moral absolutes, an attitude that persists in Buddhism to this day. Finally, the council was frankly misogynistic in its attitude to women, and only admitted nuns to the sangha based on their second-class status, and only after intense reluctance, despite evidence that the Buddha ordained women on an equal basis with men. These facts present a grave "theological" problem for Hinayana Buddhists in particular, since all the

participants in this council are supposed to have consisted of no less than 500 full-fledged arhants. We know, of course, that the Pali Canon routinely inflates numbers and descriptions to make them grander than they actually could have been. Interestingly, the "theological" status of arhants becomes a sticking point in subsequent councils, leading to the Great Schism between the Hinayana and the Mahayana, as we shall see. According to tradition, the First Buddhist Council met for seven months.

SECOND BUDDHIST COUNCIL (ca. 300 BCE)

The evidence for the Second Buddhist Council is based on the Vinaya and is attested to by the Theravada, Sarvastivada, Mulasarvastivada, Mahasamghika, Dharmaguptaka, and Mahisasaka schools. According to this tradition, the Second Buddhist Council was convened about one hundred or 110 years after the parinirvana, which according to our chronology would be about 300 BCE. Once again, the accusation of moral laxity lay at the heart of the meeting, based on observations by a monk called Yasa Kakandakaputta who observed monastics in the city of Vesali accepting money. These monks were known as Vajjiputtakas, meaning "the descendents of the Vajjians." You will recall that the Buddha modelled the sangha after the democratic constitution of the Vajji Sangha, which he greatly admired. Vesali was the capital city of the Licchavis, the dominant clan of the Vajjians. Thus, we see the first signs of sectarian division as early as 100 years after the death of the Buddha.

The Vajjiputtakas put forth a declaration consisting of Ten Points that, they opined, were permissible for members of the Order. One might speculate that this was the first attempt to identify the minor rules that the Buddha said might be abolished. These included:

- Storing salt in a horn;
- Eating food when the shadow of the sun had passed two fingers' breadth beyond noon;
- Eating once and then going again to the village for alms;
- Holding uposatha separately by monks dwelling in the same district;
- Carrying out an official act when the assembly is incomplete;
- Following a practice because it is so done by one's tutor or teacher;
- Eating sour milk by one who has already had his midday meal;
- Using strong drink before it has fermented;

- Using a rug which is not of the proper size;
- Using gold and silver.

The problem with conservatism of course is that it is unresponsive to changing circumstances, different interpretations, different personalities, and different levels of spiritual development, and the conservative monastics, following the example of Mahakasspa, rejected these practices, leading to Yasa convening a council of monastics from the west and the south under the authority of the arhant Sambhuta Thera. Sambhuta Thera ordained under Ananda after the Buddha's death. According to tradition, Ananda survived the Buddha by 40 years, becoming the second leader of the sangha, so Sambhuta Thera would have been between 60 and 100 years old. The Second Buddhist Council was held at Vesali, where purportedly 700 monastics attended. A committee was established to investigate the matter, and the Vajjiputtakas were declared heretics.

This council led to the schism between the Sthaviras ("Sect of the Elders") and the Mahasamghikas ("The Great Sangha"), the precursors of the Hinayana and the Mahayana respectively. The Mahasamghika account of the Second Buddhist Council, based on the oldest surviving account of the schism, the Sariputrapariprccha, differs slightly from the Sthavira account. According to the Mahasamghikas, the council was convened in Pataliputra and resulted from the minority (the Sthaviras) attempting to add new rules to the Vinaya, contrary to the final instructions of the Buddha. The majority (the Mahasamghikas) rejected this. A decisive fact in favour of the Mahasamghika account is that the Mahasamghika Vinaya has fewer rules than the Sthavira Vinaya and is older. The Sthaviras subsequently broke away from the majority and continued to splinter into the Sarvastivada, Vatsiputriya, and Vibhajyavada schools. The latter broke up into Mahisasaka, Dharmaguptaka, Kasyapiya, and the Tamraparniya schools. The Tamraparniya school become the Theravada school, founded in Sri Lanka by Mahinda, and is the only surviving school of the Hinayana.

According to the Theravadin account, the Pataliputra meeting occurred about 35 years later to discuss the Five Points of Mahadeva. These revolved around the status of arhants, and included: (1) Arhants can still be led astray by others; (2) Arhants are still subject to ignorance; (3) Arhants are still subject to doubt, and (4) Arhants can be instructed and informed by others; (5) Entry into the Noble Path by an Arhant can be accompanied by

a vocal utterance (vacibheda), an artifice meant to generate the appearance of the Path.[29] However, many scholars doubt the association of Mahadeva with the Second Buddhist Council or with the Great Schism, rather identifying him as the founder of the Caitika sect, a subsect of the Mahasamghika school, about 200 years later. Nonetheless, the Five Points of Mahadeva are extremely interesting in light of our discussion of the First Buddhist Council, above.

THIRD BUDDHIST COUNCIL (ca. 250 BCE)

Ashoka

A Third Buddhist Council was convened about 250 BCE in Pataliputra, purportedly by Ashoka, the great Buddhist king, himself, though this is widely doubted as Ashoka never mentions it in his edicts. It was presided over by Moggaliputta-Tissa, along with 1,000 monks. Moggaliputta-Tissa was the teacher of Ashoka and the father of Mahinda. According to the Mahavamsa, a non-canonical historical work on the history of Sri Lanka, Moggaliputta-Tissa had intentionally reincarnated in order to preside over the Third Buddhist Council, thus showing that the concept of intentional rebirth is not exclusively Tibetan.

According to the account, the sangha had become infiltrated by opportunists and heretics, paradoxically because of the royal patronage of the sangha by King Ashoka. The purpose of the council was to rid the sangha of bogus monks and heretics. As a result, some monks were refusing to participate in the uposatha. 60,000 monks were questioned, and those who could not give acceptable answers were expelled. The Kathavatthu ("Points of Controversy") is attributed to Mogaliputta-Tissa himself, who is claimed to have written it and added it to the Abhidhamma to codify the dharma. It is, incidentally, significant that this

[29] A variation of these points associated with the Northern Schools gives them as follows: "(1) An arhant may commit a sin under unconscious temptation; (2) one may be an arhant and unconscious of the fact; (3) an arhant may have doubts on matters of doctrine; (4) one cannot attain arhantship without the help of a teacher; (5) the 'Noble Way' may begin with some such exclamation as 'How sad!' uttered during meditation." Another variation states: an arhant is liable to seduction (paropahrta); subject to ignorance (ajnana); subject to doubt (kanksa); is helped across to salvation by another (paravitirna); and emits certain words (vacibheda) while on the path. This theological hair-splitting is reminiscent of similar disputes in the history of the Christian tradition.

book, traditionally ascribed to Mogaliputta-Tissa, is regarded as canonical, because this shows that the Buddhavacana is not limited to the words of the historical Buddha – an argument that is frequently levelled against the Mahayana sutras. I have discussed this elsewhere. There are other examples too of works by third parties, indicated as such, being included in the Pali Canon. Mogaliputta-Tissa referred to the essential doctrine of the Buddha as the Vibhajjavada, the Doctrine of Analysis, i.e., of phenomena, which became a school in its own right. Because of this council, Ashoka sent Buddhist emissaries to spread the dharma in five regions of present day India, Egypt, Greece, the Himalayas, Thailand, and Sri Lanka. Ashoka's expeditions to Egypt and Greece succeeded in establishing a Buddhist community in Alexandria and they may have influenced the pre-Christian monastic order of the Therapeutae. Speculations abound as to whether Buddhist influence penetrated Galilee by the 1st century CE and may have influenced the historical Jesus.

FOURTH BUDDHIST COUNCIL (HINAYANA: 1ST CENT. BCE; MAHAYANA: ca. 100 CE)

There are actually two "Fourth" Buddhist Councils. The first was held in the 1st century BCE in Sri Lanka, the second was held in Kashmir in the 1st century CE.

Aloka Lena

The Theravadin Sri Lankan council was that during which the text of the Pali Canon was first written down on palm leaves during a time of famine, when many monks starved to death and the fear was that the canonical tradition would be lost. It is said to have taken 3 years, and was held in the cleft of an ancient landslip, near Matale, called Aloka Lena. These palm leaf books were exported to Burma, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos.

The second Fourth Buddhist Council was in the Sarvastivada tradition. The word 'sarvastivada' means the 'theory that everything exists,' including past, present, and future. They split off from the Sthavira sect, already discussed in connection with the Second Buddhist Council, and became very influential in Northern India and Central Asia including Tibet. The Vaibhasika Sarvastivadins upheld the doctrine of three vehicles: those of the sravakas, pratyekabuddhas, and bodhisattvas. Thus

they appear to have been a sort of proto-Mahayana, albeit still technically Hinayana. They considered arhants imperfect and fallible. They also held that women could become Buddhas. We can see here how the polarization between Hinayana and Mahayana is largely a product of later polemics, and that the boundaries blur as one comes closer to the original, historical, non-sectarian Buddhism of Siddhattha Gotama. This polarization is perpetuated today largely by Theravadins, who wish to identify themselves with the Hinayana and the Hinayana with the original, historical, pre-sectarian Buddhism of the Founder. Mahayana, however, has never rejected the Hinayana. It is actually a downfall for a bodhisattva to reject or disparage the Hinayana in any way. It's very exciting therefore, to discover that a complete or nearly complete set of the Sarvastivada sutras has recently been discovered in Afghanistan. The Sarvastivada Vinaya also survives in translation.

FIFTH AND SIXTH COUNCILS

In addition to the foregoing, a fifth and sixth Theravada Buddhist council were held in 1871 and 1954 respectively, the latter based on the 2,500th anniversary of the Buddha, the midpoint of the Buddhist 5,000 year cycle, based on Theravadin chronology. Based on the view of an increasing number of scholars, however, the 2,500th anniversary of the parinirvana would better be placed within twenty years or so of 2100 CE. Of course, any Buddhist council that is explicitly sectarian violates the Buddha's dictum on consensus, so in fact these later councils cannot really be regarded in the same way as the early councils. These councils resulted in the publication of two authoritative editions of the Tipitaka.

FINDING THE BUDDHAVACANA

As we have seen, historical Buddhism became deeply contentious and divided very soon after the death of the Buddha. We can see the seeds of schism even in the First Buddhist Council, and by the Second Buddhist Council 100 years later the tendency was already well established. Yet all of these schools had the same intention: the desire to preserve and perpetuate the original and authentic Buddhavacana. After more than a hundred years of critical scholarship the question arises: Where shall we in the West look for the Buddhavacana, or is such a thing even findable?

Perhaps we should simply choose an historical school based on our personal predilections and leave it at that? Yet Western scholars are coming to a consensus, based on decades of comparative study, that a core Buddhavacana is identifiable. Comparative study of the Nikayas of the Sutta Pitaka in different canons, now that we can compare the Theravadin and the Sarvastivadin canons, and in Tibetan and Chinese translations, has demonstrated remarkable similarity of essentials within which one can discern the outlines of a coherent and noble spiritual philosophy. Many scholars now agree that it appears that the redactors and editors of these texts chose to limit, to a significant degree, their sectarian disputes to their respective Abhidhammas and non-canonical works, each school having its own Abhidhamma, most differences between the suttas being mainly matters of dramatis personae, location, and other minor details. This is not to say, however, that one can naively identify the suttas with the original words of the Buddha, as I have discussed at some length, but they do provide a basis for further elucidation and study. The fact that the canon includes works written by other authors also shows that the Budhavacana is not to be narrowly identified with the words of the historical Buddha, who was preceded and will be followed by Buddhas other than Siddattha Gotama. The Buddha himself indicated that there are many things he did not reveal, probably due to the limitations of human beings in this age. This age is fortunate in that it will have seen five Buddhas, but also degenerate in that the lifespan of human beings is barely 120 years. We should not focus on the axioms of historical Buddhism to the exclusion of implications, or imagine that a literal historical reconstruction of the original words of the historical Buddha is possible or even desirable. Having narrowed our focus to the suttas we must immediately expand it to include them all in their totality, and then allow the work of rational criticism to proceed, employing all intellectual and hermeneutical tools at our disposal, including Pali linguistics, without reference to any sectarian considerations. There is no indication whatsoever of any sectarian tendency in the Buddha himself. For this reason, no sect of Buddhism can claim to possess absolute and exclusive truth and neither can we. This perspective is actually adumbrated in the

scriptural tradition of Buddhism, where it is called the ekayana – the single or universal vehicle.[30]

[30] The main ekayana sutras include the Lankavatara Sutra, Avatamsaka Sutra, Lotus Sutra, and Shurangama Sutra, as well as the Srimaladevi Simhanada Sutra, Sraddhotpanna Sutra, and Mahayana Mahaparinirvana Sutra.

5
Ethics in the Pali Canon

"Nobody listened to Him, that is why there is Buddhism." Krishnamurti

Contemporary religious Buddhists, in both Asia and the West, put great stock in the following of rules. This refers especially to the Five Precepts (Pancha Sila), also called Pansil, followed by the laity, and the Patimokkha rules of the Vinaya. The latter are followed by the members of the sangha. Therefore, it is interesting to find that this attitude does not square with the teachings of the Buddha as declared in the Pali Canon. Also, the rules themselves – i.e., the Pancha Sila and the Patimokkha – do not correspond with each other very well. The common attitude towards the precepts collectively is that they are "training rules" that purify karmic obscurations and concentrate the mind. The latter is the literal meaning of "vinaya" – i.e., vi – intensification, + naya – negation, similar in meaning to the term niyama in Patanjali's Yoga Sutras. However, a great number of the Patimokkha rules have nothing to do with spiritual development as such. Rather, they represent an ad hoc code of behaviour that developed over the course of the Buddha's life in response to the day-to-day circumstances of the communal life of the sangha. Many religious Buddhists seem to believe that the rules are moral absolutes, and therefore necessary preconditions of spiritual development. Nevertheless, the Buddha himself stated that the rules should not compromise good health and that the rules may be abrogated in the event of poor health. In addition, in the very first sutta of the Pali Canon, the Buddha warns against attachment to the rules; he also declares that ethical considerations are "elementary and inferior." At the end of his life, just prior to the parinirvana, the Buddha further stated that the "minor and lesser rules" may be abolished. We even have the cautionary example of

Devadatta, the Buddha's cousin, who criticized the sangha for laxity and attempted to institute a sangha characterized by much stricter observances, including mandatory vegetarianism, which the Buddha specifically rejected. Devadatta was so filled with self-righteous hatred that he tried to murder the Buddha.

COMPARISON OF THE PANCHA SILA AND THE PATIMOKKHA

Pansil consists of Five Precepts, viz., no killing, no stealing, no lying, no sexual wrongdoing, and no alcohol. When we compare this formula with the Vinaya, we find that three of the four parajikas (defeats), the most serious level of offence, correspond, but in a different order, viz., no sexual wrongdoing, no stealing, and no killing. The fourth defeat is claiming a spiritual attainment that one does not possess, which is a form of lying. However, neither lying in general nor consuming alcohol is mentioned as such. The next reference to lying occurs in the thirteen sanghadisesas (rules that require a meeting) in the context of making unfounded charges against another bhikku with the intention of having him disrobed, but lying in general does not appear until the ninety-two pacittiyas, the minor rules calling for confession only, and alcohol is not mentioned until the fifty-first item in the same group, followed by tickling. It seems that what we are seeing here is a movement from a significantly more liberal Vinaya to increasing emphasis on rules as the sangha became increasingly intolerant over time. We also see this phenomenon taking place after the Buddha's death, leading ultimately to the schism between the Hinayana and the Mahayana. What is clear is that the original monastic rules were far more liberal and less inflexible than the later sangha came to believe, and that the consumption of alcohol in particular was a minor matter or even a matter of no consequence, given that the Buddha himself was willing to see it abolished. Thus, it appears that calls for the return of the sangha to the original rules that one hears in various quarters today are far from the spirit or intention of the historical Buddha as described in the Pali Canon and are in fact a symptom of the degeneration of the age (mappo) at the nadir of the Buddhadharma, precisely contrary to what fundamentalists claim to intend.

ETHICS ARE ELEMENTARY AND INFERIOR

The Brahmajala Sutta, called the All-Embracing Net of Views, is the first sutta of the Pali Canon. In it, the Buddha responds to a conversation between two brahman wanderers, Suppiya and the youth Brahmadatta. They are discussing the behaviour of the Buddha and his disciples. Interestingly, it is the youth who defends the Buddha, but his elder disdains him. Thus, from a discussion on how his disciples should reply to those who criticize or praise the Buddha and his disciples, the Buddha segues into a discussion of virtue, commencing with the following remarkable statement:

> 7. It is, bhikkhus, only to trifling and insignificant matters, to the minor details of mere moral virtue, which a worldling would refer when speaking in praise of the Tathagata. And what are those trifling and insignificant matters, those minor details of mere moral virtue, to which he would refer?
>
> 8. "Having abandoned the destruction of life, the recluse Gotama abstains from the destruction of life. He has laid aside the rod and the sword, and dwells conscientious, full of kindness, compassionate for the welfare of all living beings. It is in this way, bhikkhus, that the worldling would speak when speaking in praise of the Tathagata.
>
> Or he might say: 'Having abandoned taking what is not given, the recluse Gotama abstains from taking what is not given. Accepting and expecting only what is given, he dwells in honesty and rectitude of heart.'
>
> Or he might say: 'Having abandoned unchaste living, the recluse Gotama lives the life of chastity. He dwells remote (from women), and abstains from the vulgar practice of sexual intercourse.'
>
> 9. Or he might say: 'Having abandoned false speech, the recluse Gotama abstains from falsehood. He speaks only the truth, he lives devoted to truth; trustworthy and reliable, he does not deceive anyone in the world.'
>
> Or he might say: 'Having abandoned slander, the recluse Gotama abstains from slander. He does not repeat elsewhere what he has heard here in order to divide others from the people here, nor does he repeat here what he has heard elsewhere in order to divide these from the people there. Thus, he is a reconciler of those who are divided and a promoter of friendships. Rejoicing, delighting, and exulting in concord, he speaks only words that are conducive to concord.'
>
> Or he might say: 'Having abandoned harsh speech, the recluse Gotama abstains from harsh speech. He speaks only such words as are gentle,

> pleasing to the ear, endearing, going to the heart, urbane, amiable, and agreeable to many people.'
>
> Or he might say: 'Having abandoned idle chatter, the recluse Gotama abstains from idle chatter. He speaks at the right time, speaks what is factual, and speaks on the good, on the Dhamma and the Discipline. His words are worth treasuring: they are timely, backed by reason, definite and connected with the good.'
>
> 10. Or he might say: 'The recluse Gotama abstains from damaging seed and plant life. He eats only in one part of the day, refraining from food at night and from eating at improper times. He abstains from dancing, singing, instrumental music, and witnessing unsuitable shows. He abstains from wearing garlands, embellishing himself with scents, and beautifying himself with unguents. He abstains from accepting gold and silver. He abstains from accepting uncooked grain, raw meat, women, and girls, male and female slaves, goats and sheep, fowl and swine, elephants, cattle, horses and mares. He abstains from accepting fields and lands. He abstains from running messages and errands. He abstains from buying and selling, and from dealing with false weights, false metals, and false measures. He abstains from the crooked ways of bribery, deception, and fraud. He abstains from mutilating, executing, imprisoning, robbery, plunder, and violence.'
>
> It is in this way, bhikkhus, that the worldling would speak when speaking in praise of the Tathagata.

The translation "worldling" does not quite capture the quality of inferiority of the puthujjana as one who has not heard, i.e., does not understand, the dharma. The Buddha's list of ethical virtues, which he regards as elementary and inferior ("trifling," "insignificant," and "minor" in this translation) and therefore the least of his disciples' attainments, is all that the ignorant puthujjana is able to realize. These include the first four major virtues of the Pancha Sila, viz., no killing, no stealing, no sex, and no lying. The Pali phrase is appamatakam oramattakam silamattakam – literally, "negligible and worldly measures of moral practice." We might even use the words "superficial" or "exoteric." Interestingly, alcohol is nowhere mentioned. The Buddha goes on to catalogue virtually all the rules to which the monks are subject, still under the rubric of "those trifling and insignificant matters, those minor details of mere moral virtue, to which [the puthujjana] would refer." In subsequent sections, he contrasts these ethical and moral rules and observances with "those who would rightly praise the Tathagata in accordance with reality would

speak." The implication is that praising them for mere ethical observances is actually wrong. He describes these as "other dhammas, deep, difficult to see, difficult to understand, peaceful and sublime, beyond the sphere of reasoning, subtle, comprehensible only to the wise, which the Tathagata, having realized for himself with direct knowledge, propounds to others." In other words, as discussed by Peter Masefield in *Divine Revelation in the Pali Canon,* ethics, i.e., karma, is the religion of the puthujjana, which is inferior to the religion of the Arhants ("the wise"), which consists of direct spiritual knowledge or gnosis and its results.

Similarly, in the third book of the Anguttara Nikaya the Buddha declares that any monk who follows the essential principles of the Vinaya is absolved of any violation of the minor and lesser rules: "Whatever minor, trifling observances he may transgress, he is cleared of them. Why so? I do not declare him to be rendered unfit because of them, for he strictly observes the rudiments [adibrahmacariyakani] of the holy life, the constituents of the holy life."[31] Such a one is even capable of emancipation.

ATTACHMENT TO THE RULES IS AN ERROR

The Buddha also speaks of the error of attachment to rites, rituals, and rules (silabbata-paramaso) in the Sutta Pitaka's list of ten fetters. This is identified in the Sangiti Sutta and the Dhammasangani as one of the three most important fetters, along with belief in a self and doubt. This is also the essence of the Buddha's criticism of Brahmanism, concerning which he is utterly derogatory. When the Buddha criticizes Brahmanism, he is not merely criticizing the beliefs of an opposing sect; he is criticizing the phenomenon by which original and originating spiritual truths degenerate into mere observances – rites, rituals, and rules. In other words, the Buddha is attacking the very idea of religion itself. Of course, Buddhism itself, as an historical phenomenon, is not immune to this process of degeneration; we may refer to a process of spiritual entropy. Today, Buddhism too has become a religion. Rites, rituals, and rules have replaced the interior and spiritual realities to which they attest. Slavish adherence to the letter of the Vinaya is just another example of this. The Buddha addresses this explicitly in the third book of the Anguttara Nikaya. He agrees with Ananda's otherwise paradoxical insight "that moral

[31] AN, iii, 9, 85, trans. Hare.

practice, way of living, sanctity of life, and excellence of service which increase unprofitable states and decrease profitable states in him who observes them, – such moral practice and so forth are without fruit. But those which have the contrary result do have this fruit."[32] The meaning is that these practices do not in themselves result in emancipation but are merely aids.

THE LESSER AND MINOR RULES MAY BE ABOLISHED

The Mahaparinirvana Sutta, called the Last Days of the Buddha, recounts the Buddha's final teachings and death (parinirvana). In the Final Exhortation, after instructing Ananda and the rest of the sangha to follow the Dharma and the Discipline (Vinaya) as their Master after the Buddha's death, the third instruction of the Buddha to the sangha was: "If it is desired, Ananda, the Sangha may, when I am gone, abolish the lesser and minor rules." However, because Ananda did not think to ask the Buddha which offences he was referring to, the sangha at that time chose not to abolish any of them. The question then becomes, are we to be chained to this decision, made 2,400 years ago, forever? I do not believe that this was the Buddha's intention, based on the evidence of the texts.

In fact, the Buddha implies that the entire Vinaya could be replaced. In the third book of the Anguttara Nikaya, a monk from the Vajjian clan complains to the Buddha about the Vinaya: "Lord, the recital I have to make twice a month amounts to more than a hundred and fifty rules [ultimately, the Vinaya included 227 rules in the Theravadin redaction]. Lord, I can't stand such a training." Rather than rebuke the monk, the Buddha replied, "Well, monk, can you stand the training in the three particulars: That in the higher morality, in the higher thought and that in the higher insight?" Thus, the Buddha gave the monk permission to abandon the rules of the Vinaya in exchange for training in the higher morality, thought, and insight. "Then," the Buddha said, "when you are proficient in the higher morality, thought and insight, then lust, malice and delusion will be abandoned by you. When you have abandoned these you will not perform any wrong deed, you will not follow any wicked way."[33] In other words, action follows from intention, and intention from

[32] AN iii, 8, 78, trans. Hare.
[33] AN, iii, 9, 83, trans. Hare.

wisdom, so the cultivation of wisdom directly is an effective alternative to the Vinaya. This became the basis of the Prajnaparamita. Rules are merely skilful means (upaya), not moral absolutes.

DEVADATTA

Devadatta was a Buddhist monk who was also a cousin and brother-in-law of the Buddha, as well as the brother of Ananda. He belonged to the Koliyan clan. According to the Pali tradition he left the Buddha's community with five hundred other monks to establish their own sangha. Most of these are said to have been Shakya clan relatives of both Devadatta and Siddattha. Devadatta became obsessed with his own worth. He came to believe that he and not Siddattha should lead the Sangha. Devadatta then requested the Buddha to step down and allow him to take over the Sangha. The Buddha replied that he did not even let his trusted disciples Sariputta or Moggallana run the sangha, let alone one like Devadatta, "who should be vomited like spittle." The Buddha made a public declaration against him. He warned the monks that Devadatta had changed for the worse. Devadatta responded by encouraging Prince Ajatasattu to kill his father, the good King Bimbisara, while Devadatta would murder the Buddha. Devadatta then tried to kill the Buddha himself by pushing a rock down a hill below which the Buddha was walking. As this also failed, he tried to get the elephant Nalagiri intoxicated and set him on the Buddha while the Buddha was on alms round. However, the power of the Buddha's loving-kindness (metta) overcame the elephant. Devadatta then tried to create a division within the order. He gathered a few monastic supporters and insisted that the Buddha agree to the following rules for the monks: they should live permanently in the forest, survive solely on alms obtained through begging, wear only robes made from discarded rags, live at the base of a tree, and abstain entirely from fish and meat. The Buddha permitted the monastics to observe all this except the prohibition against eating fish and meat, leading Devadatta to criticize him for living in abundance and luxury, similar to the accusation made by the Group of Five before the Buddha's enlightenment. Devadatta decided to create a schism, reciting the training rules (patimokkha) separately from the Buddha and his followers, along with five hundred newly ordained monks. The Buddha sent his two chief disciples, Sariputta and Moggallana, to retrieve the

misguided young monks. Devadatta mistakenly believed they had come to join his sangha and asked Sariputta to give a talk. While Devadatta slept, the chief disciples convinced the young monks to return to the Buddha. The foregoing account makes the Buddha's attitude to the monastic rules clear. He explicitly sought a middle way between extremes and specifically rejected strict vegetarianism.

MANY RULES HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT

The all-too-common view accepted by some Buddhists, both in Asia and the West, that the value of one's spiritual practice is a function of the number of rules that one follows has resulted in a rather competitive and denigrating view of Buddhist teachers. This is directly contradicted by a common-sense evaluation of the rules themselves. To illustrate my point, I will summarize below a number of rules that, I would suggest, have nothing whatever to do with spiritual development, other than the spiritual value of hypervigilance itself.[34] However, hypervigilance does not reflect the value of the rule as such. For example, the sanghadisesas (rules requiring an initial and subsequent meeting of the sangha) include the following: "Building a hut without permission from the sangha, or building a hut that exceeds 3 × 1.75 meters in size." If someone believes that building a hut without permission of the sangha or beyond a specified area is a necessity of spiritual development, I am afraid I must dissent. The following is a list of the entire nissaggiya pacittiya (confession with forfeiture). To my mind, only #18, 19, and 20, and perhaps #25, have anything at all to do with spiritual development, whereas #30 clearly falls into the general category of stealing and is therefore redundant.

1. Keeping an extra robe for more than ten days after receiving a new one.
2. Sleeping in a separate place from any of his three robes.
3. Keeping an out-of-season robe for more than thirty days when one has expectation for a new robe.
4. Getting an unrelated bhikkuni to wash your robes for you.
5. Accepting robes from a bhikkuni as a gift.

[34] "Lack of self-control is falling away. Self-control is success." Parivara (in Horner, *The Book of the Discipline,* Vol. VI,, 1.2).

6. Accepting robes from the laity, except when one's own robes have been destroyed, or one is asking for the sake of another bhikku.
7. Accepting too many robes from the laity when one's own robes have been destroyed.
8. Accepting a robe from a layperson after telling them that their robe is too cheap for you.
9. Accepting a robe from the laity after asking two or more of them to pool their funds in order to buy a nicer robe.
10. Accepting a robe after coming to the treasurer to get the robe more than six times (since this indicates an excess of desire).
11. Owning a blanket or rug made of silk.
12. Making or accepting a blanket or rug made from pure black wool.
13. Making or accepting a blanket or rug made from more than 50% black wool.
14. Making or accepting a blanket or rug fewer than 6 years after you last made or accepted one.
15. Making or accepting a sitting rug without incorporating at least one old piece of felt twenty-five cm. square, for the sake of discoloring it.
16. Carrying raw wool for more than forty-eight km.
17. Getting a bhikkuni to wash, dye, or card raw wool.
18. Accepting gold or money, or telling someone how to donate it.
19. Buying or selling goods.
20. Trading goods with anyone besides other bhikkus.
21. Keeping an extra alms bowl for more than ten days after receiving a new one.
22. Asking for a new bowl when your old bowl is not beyond repair.
23. Taking a medicine from storage for more than seven days.
24. Using a rains-bathing cloth before the last two weeks of the fourth month of the hot season, or accepting one before the fourth month.
25. Taking back a loaned robe out of anger.
26. Getting thread and getting people to weave thread for you.
27. Receiving cloth after telling its weavers to increase the quality for you.
28. Keeping robes past the end of the season after accepting them during the last eleven days of the Rains Retreat (Vassa).

29. Being separated from your robes for more than six nights if you are living in a dangerously distant village and need to separate yourself from your robes after the Rains Retreat.
30. Persuading a donor to give gifts to oneself, when they were previously intended for the sangha at large.

The ninety-two pacittiya rules entailing confession, which I will not list here, also include many rules like this. These include the minor rules that the Buddha said might be abolished.

RULES MAY BE IGNORED IN MATTERS OF HEALTH AND SICKNESS

The Vinaya rules are not moral absolutes. The Buddha put matters of health and physical well-being above the Vinaya. For example, a sick monk is permitted to consume special foods that might not otherwise be permitted, be attended by a female physician, take food at times that would not normally be permitted, and, perhaps most significantly of all, a sick monk may take drugs if necessary for health. The Buddha is quite liberal in this regard. For example, in the following passage he allows not only remedial treatments, but also preventative ones: "Properly considering medicinal requisites for curing the sick, I use them: simply to ward off any pains of illness that have arisen, and for the maximum freedom from disease."

Today we know in fact that a varied diet consisting of a certain number of calories is required daily for good health, and that marijuana and alcohol have real medicinal value. Even the Qur'an recognizes the medicinal value of alcohol. Consequently, it follows that the rules of the Vinaya, insofar as they prohibit such things, should not apply if such things are pursued with the intention of "the maximum freedom from disease." Knowledge changes and Buddhism must always be based on truth, as the Dalai Lama has said. It also follows from the foregoing that any practice that harms health is contrary to the Buddhadharma.

THE SANGHA SHOULD REFLECT SOCIAL VALUES

In *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics,* author Peter Harvey argues that social acceptability was a key concern for the sangha, since the sangha

depended on material support from lay society. Similarly, Richard Gombrich states that "often the reason why the Buddha formulates a vinaya rule is to placate public criticism."[35] This shows that the monastic rules are culturally and historically contingent, at least in part. Therefore, one may argue that the sangha should be responsive to the social norms of the societies in which it finds itself. Today, for example, we no longer believe in the inferiority of women and homosexuals. Therefore, monastic rules that discriminate against these groups should be abolished.

INTENTION, NOT ACTION, IS THE CAUSE OF KARMA

The Buddha was critical of the Jain view that action causes karma in much the same way that the Christian is critical of the Jewish/Islamic view that spirituality is all about obedience to a code of ethics. Karma means "action" or "doing," but in Buddhism the term refers specifically to those actions that spring from unenlightened intention (cetana). In the Nibbedhika Sutta, the Buddha says: "Intention I tell you, is kamma. Intending, one does kamma by way of body, speech, & intellect."

Whenever a person acts there is some quality of mental intention at its root. It is this quality, not the outward appearance of the action or the action itself, that determines the effect. If one appears to be benevolent but acts with greed, anger, or hatred, then the fruit of those actions will bear testimony to the fundamental intention that lay behind them and will be a cause for future unhappiness. The Buddha spoke of wholesome actions that result in happiness, and unwholesome actions that result in unhappiness. The Buddha also elaborated that it is impossible for virtuous action to produce unfavorable results, and for non-virtuous action to produce favorable results. If a deed is done too casually or the intention behind it is not pure, one may not be able to enjoy the benefit. There are two classes of determined deeds that always produce good or bad results respectively, and a class of deeds that may produce either good or bad results presumably depending on the context, although the Buddha did not elaborate. Good karma is described as generating merit, whereas bad karma is described as demerit, but it is always the underlying intention that is the decisive factor.

[35] *What the Buddha Thought,* 52.

FOLLOWING THE VINAYA IS NOT A PRECONDITION OF ENLIGHTENMENT

It is a common prejudice that membership in the sangha is a prerequisite of enlightenment. I have even heard a Western Tibetan Buddhist describe the sangha as a "machine" for the "production" of enlightenment, rather like an industrial assembly line producing widgets. However, enlightenment is not a karmic production but rather emancipation from karma. Therefore, enlightenment cannot be "produced" by following any regime or system of rules. This is confirmed by the fact that in the Pali Canon we find examples of householders becoming enlightened. Often this occurs after the passage of a very short time. If following the rules alone were sufficient to attain enlightenment, then we should expect to find the sangha teeming with enlightened beings. In fact, we find the reverse: enlightened beings are very much the exception, not the rule. Therefore, enlightened beings cannot be produced merely by predictably observing rules. The Buddha's theory of karmic action and effect did not encompass all causes and results. Any given action may cause all sorts of results. The karmic results are only that subset of results that impinges upon the doer of the action because of both the moral quality of the action and the intention behind it.

Peter Masefield, author of *Divine Revelation in the Pali Canon*, distinguishes between the puthujjana sangha and the ariyasangha. The putthujjana sangha is far more numerous. He also recognizes that the ariyasangha included not merely monks, but also numerous householders. Some of these householders subsequently joined the sangha, but not all. Therefore, the proper spiritual division of the Buddhist world is not between the laity and the sangha, as it is today, based on the pretence that sangha = ariyasangha, but between the puthujjana and the sravaka (hearer). This allows for the possibility of lay enlightened beings. One example of such is the Tibetan mahasiddha.

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS AN ESSENTIAL VINAYA

The rules of the Patimokkha are often redundant. They represent analyses of more general original rules that were then refined over time in response to particular circumstances. This is why the Buddha said that the lesser and minor rules could be abolished. He recognized their relative and contingent nature. This is recognized in the third book of the

Anguttara Nikaya, where the Buddha says, "Monks, this recital to be made twice a month amounts to more than one hundred and fifty rules wherein are trained clansmen who are eager for their welfare. Now all these combine to make these three forms of training. What three? The higher morality, the higher thought and the higher insight. Herein are combined one and all of these rules."[36] I have referred to these three principles already. Once we eliminate the minor and lesser rules, the rules that have no spiritual value but are culturally and historically contingent, and the rules that discriminate against nuns (bhikkunis), we find that the Vinaya may be resolved into less than ten essential ethical principles:

1. No sexual wrongdoing, especially inappropriate relations with women. For monks and nuns, this means no sex of any kind, including orgasm, except unintentionally in dreams, where no blame accrues. For the laity, this means no adultery and perhaps sexual restraint generally.
2. Not taking what is not given, which is generally equated to stealing.
3. Not killing or harming living or sentient beings.
4. No wrongful speech, especially lying, but also including harmful gossip, etc.
5. Moderate and healthful eating. Note that, contrary to some beliefs, the Buddha of the Pali Canon specifically refuses to prohibit eating meat, unless the animal has been specifically killed for one, in which case it is forbidden. If one is a monastic, this means eating only a single meal of solid food in mid to late morning. Liquids are permitted after noon.
6. Not engaging in trade or business, or accepting money. For the laity, this means avoiding wrong types of livelihood, corrupt or deceptive business practices, and price gouging. Five types of livelihood are specifically prohibited to Buddhist householders – these are trading in weapons, humans, flesh, spirits, and poison.
7. Many of the remaining rules can be grouped under the heading of "no ostentatious living," for example, the avoidance of vanity, entertainments, and self-elevation. For a monk or a nun this means

[36] AN iii, 9, 85.

a vow of moderate poverty. For a householder, it means leading a simple and honest life.

8. In addition, one is not to be the cause of any of these things.

Interestingly, there is nothing here about not drinking alcohol, on which so much emphasis is placed today by fundamentalists, even to the extent of replacing the original prohibition against drinking fermented grains, i.e., what we would call today "spirits," with all alcoholic beverages, including beer, wine, and non-prescription drugs, including psychedelic plant medicines. In the Patimokkha rules, drinking fermented grains is a minor offence only that is completely expiated by confession alone. How unlike the Pancha Sila this is, where taking any alcohol is the fifth precept of the laity, alongside killing, stealing, lying, and sexual misconduct. Clearly, we see here a hardening of the rules and a movement towards fundamentalism in the Pancha Sila that we do not see in the Vinaya. According to the Wikipedia article on the Vinaya,

> It is thought that originally, there were no rules and the Buddha and his disciples just lived in harmony when they were together. Most of the time they would have been wandering alone, but every year, during the monsoon season when travelling became impossible, the bhikkhus would come together for a few months. As the sangha became bigger and started accepting people of lesser ability who remained unenlightened, it became necessary to begin having rules.

In other words, the increasing emphasis on rules is actually a result of degeneration and decreasing merit. Therefore, it is a symptom of the mappo (the age of degeneration), at the nadir of which we now are. The current emphasis of religious fundamentalists on following rules as such, in common with Jews and Moslems, is actually a symptom of the puthujjana sangha. On the other hand, the Tibetan mahasiddhis, who ultimately follow no rules, represent the apotheosis of enlightenment for precisely this reason. This observation accords with Tibetan tradition too, which places the mahasiddhas above the monastics.

The Dharmaguptaka Vinaya is one of the three surviving Vinaya lineages, followed in China, Vietnam, and Korea. They rejected the Sarvastivadin Vinaya on the grounds that the original teachings of the Buddha had been lost, and follow their own Vinaya of 250 rules. There are

six extant Vinayas: those of the Theravada, Mahasamghika, Mahisasika, Dharmaguptaka, Sarvastivada, and the Mulasarvastivada, of which only the Theravada, Dharmaguptaka, and Mulasarvastivada survive in practice. However, the scholarly consensus is that the oldest Vinaya is that of the Mahasamghikas, which subsequently developed into the Mahayana. South-east Asian Mahayana schools reject the Vinaya altogether, and follow the bodhisattva precepts only. This includes bodhisattva self-ordination based on the Srimala and Brahma Net sutras. These schools include the Japanese Saicho, Tendai, Soto Zen, Shingon, and Jodo Shu sects.

APPENDIX

The following quotation is taken from my Review of "Rebirth as Empirical Basis for the Buddha's Four Noble Truths," by Prof. H.J. Sugunasiri. This essay effectively refutes rules-based soteriology within the context of Buddhism, discussed above under the heading "Intention, Not Action, Is the Cause of Karma."

> With respect to the First Noble Truth, that life is suffering, it is doubtless true that life includes suffering, but it is also true that life includes joy. As against the fundamentalist objection to this observation that all such joys devolve inevitably into suffering, we posit the primary fact, alluded to in the texts repeatedly, that nirvana is itself not an affectively neutral state but rather a state of absolute and undying bliss and compassion. The Buddha himself experienced nirvana at the age of 35, and for another 45 years persisted in this state, immune to the suffering of life. Yet the Buddha himself was doubtless alive during all this time.
>
> With respect to the Second Noble Truth, that the cause of suffering is desire, in fact upon further analysis we discover that the desire of which the Buddha spoke is not simply desire per se, but rather a state of what might be called desirous attachment, craving, or clinging. From this, we conclude that the true meaning of the Third Noble Truth, that the annihilation or transcendence of suffering is achieved through the cessation of desire really means the annihilation or transcendence of attachment. This leaves open the possibility of a purely expansive, joyful enthusiasm that might appear superficially as eros but is in fact not subject to suffering because it is not based on attachment. In fact, I would suggest that this is quite similar to the compassion that the Buddha himself demonstrated in his dealings with others. It is clear that the Buddha was not indifferent to others, but in fact

sought actively to positively engage them for their benefit. One might also call this state love (metta).

Finally, with respect to the Fourth Noble Truth, the so-called Noble Eightfold Path, it is commonly understood that by severing one's bonds to life one will inevitably achieve emancipation. This interpretation is based on the naive notion that samsara or phenomenological experiential existence is like a machine, and that we can achieve nirvana simply by "turning off" the machine. Thus, the whole focus of religious practice is on renunciation, typically identified with the practice of Five, Eight, Ten, or 227 or 311 Precepts, consisting of abstinence from the so-called defilements of killing, taking what is not given, lying, sensory pleasure, and mental intoxication, etc. The fundamental idea here is that by severing the bonds of karma one can achieve emancipation. However, such a regime is impossible in practice, even for the Buddha. Therefore, if simple abstinence were the precondition of emancipation, then even the Buddha would have failed to achieve emancipation, for such a procedure is, objectively considered, impossible. In every moment of his existence the Buddha killed countless beings, for, as we now know, the human immune system, yea, even the act of breathing itself, kills countless infinitesimal living beings (viruses, bacteria, etc.). Again, with every breath and with every item of food that he ingested, the Buddha took from countless beings, not all of which could possibly have given their permission, as everything made or grown is the resultant of a complex productive system essentially infinite in extent. The Buddha lied with every word he spoke, for language inevitably distorts the underlying truth to which it attests: in the words of Alfred Korzybski, the map is not the territory. With respect to sensory pleasure, the Buddha existed in a body, the essential nature of which is sensation, and sensation is inherently associated with feelings of pleasure (as well as pain). Finally, with respect to intoxication, sensation also deludes the mind with respect to the essential nature of reality. Therefore, again, as a sensory being, the Buddha existed in a state of mental intoxication, simply by virtue of interacting with the sensory world, in addition to his realization of the true nature of reality. This is, of course, the Buddhist objection to Jainism and extreme asceticism itself. So long as one identifies karma with action, one has missed the point, and turned Buddhism into just another religion, which is precisely contrary to the Buddha's intention.

CATEGORIES OF THE PATTIMOKKHA

- four parajika, entailing defeat;
- thirteen sanghadisesa, entailing communal meetings;

- two aniyata, indefinite or undetermined rules;
- thirty nissaggiya pacittiya, entailing forfeiture and confession;
- ninety-two pacittiya, entailing confession;
- four patidesaniya, entailing acknowledgement;
- seventy-five sekhiyavatta, trainings; and
- seven adhikarana samatha, the settlement of issues.

6
Overview of the Vinaya

The Pali word vinaya literally means 'control'[37] or 'discipline.' It is the first of three major divisions of the Pali Canon, the oldest extant collection of Buddhist scriptures. The Vinaya is followed by the Discourses (suttas) and the Higher Doctrine (abhidhamma). In English translation the Old School (Theravada) version consists of six volumes. These consist of the Rule Analysis (Suttavibhanga) (3 vols.), The Great Chapter (Mahavagga) (1 vol.), The Minor Chapter (Cullavagga) (1 vol.), and an Appendix (Parivara) (1 vol.). The Great and Minor Chapters together are called the Division (Khandhaka). The Parivara is generally conceded to be later, maybe as late as the 1st century BCE. This is when the Pali Canon itself was first committed to writing.

Considered as a mode of spiritual development, the Vinaya advocates the practice of hypervigilance. Hypervigilance is a form of mindfulness (sati) characterized by extreme awareness and self-control. By this means the generation of negative karma is inhibited and the will disciplined and strengthened. This corresponds to physical and mental restraint (yama and niyama) in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali (2nd–4th cent. CE?), itself influenced by Buddhism. However, the Vinaya represents itself as secondary to spiritual practice proper, rather its precondition, not salvific in and of itself. Throughout the Pali Canon and later sutras as well it is quite clear that Wisdom, not morality or meditation, is the essential salvific factor.

The Vinaya consists of the rules and procedures that govern the Buddhist monastic order (sangha), consisting of male and female monastics.

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[37] Vinaya is control of body and speech, meditation of mind.

THE GREAT OCEAN

The Buddha compares the doctrine (dharma) and the discipline to a great ocean with eight strange and wonderful qualities. It is delightful to the anti-gods (asuras) that live therein. This and other positive references to the asuras in the Pali Canon are curious in that the anti-gods are traditionally seen as evil, but they were not always looked at this way. Is the Buddha recalling a past time when the anti-gods were superior devas rather than outcastes? In any case, the eight qualities are as follows:

- The great ocean deepens, slopes, and shelves gradually, without abruptness like a precipice.
- The great ocean is stable, not overflowing its margins.
- The great ocean throws up a dead body.
- The great rivers on reaching the great ocean lose their former names and identities.
- Streams and showers go into the great ocean, but the emptiness or fullness of the great ocean is not affected.
- The great ocean has one uniformly salty taste.
- The great ocean has many treasures, such as pearl, crystal, lapis lazuli, shell, quartz, coral, silver, gold, ruby, and cat's eye.
- The great ocean is the abode of great beings of enormous size, including fish, anti-gods, and serpents.

In the same way, with respect to the doctrine and the discipline:

- Training is progressive, with no abruptness such as penetration of profound knowledge.
- Disciples will not transgress the rules of training, even if their lives depend on it.
- The order does not live in communion with immoral people.
- Members of the castes, having gone from home into homelessness, lose their former names and families and are reckoned simply as recluses, sons of the Shakyan.
- Even if many monastics attain emancipation (nirvana) in the nirvana condition in which no more groups are remaining, not by that

is either the emptiness or the fullness of the nirvana condition affected.[38]

- The doctrine and the discipline have one taste, the taste of emancipation.
- The doctrine and the discipline have many treasures, including the four arousings of mindfulness, the four right efforts, the four bases of psychic power, the five faculties, the seven links in awakening, and the Noble Eightfold Way.
- The doctrine and the discipline are the abode of great beings, including stream attainers, once returners, non-returners, and the arhants, and those on the way to attaining these states.

There are three Vinaya traditions currently followed by Theravadin, Tibetan, and East Asian Buddhists. At least four additional Vinaya traditions are now extinct. Six complete versions survive. All Buddhist countries follow the Vinaya, except Japan, which follows the Great Vehicle (Mahayana) precepts, such as the fifty-eight Great Vehicle precepts of the Brahma Net Sutra (see appendix), a.k.a. the Bodhisattva precepts, including self-ordination. In fact, the Bodhisattva precepts and the rules of the Vinaya are very similar. Scholars generally believe that the content of most Vinayas, which are also very similar to each other, are presectarian in content but not in form. In other words, these are individual adaptations of a common underlying tradition. All known Vinaya texts use the same system of organization and contain the same sections, suggesting that the structure if not the content of the Vinaya is presectarian. Here we will be discussing the Old School's Vinaya, mainly because that is the only Vinaya tradition that has been translated into English as far as I know. The existing manuscript traditions date from the 5th century CE, about 800–900 years after the passing the Buddha. The oldest Vinaya seems to be that of the Great Order (Mahasamghika), which has fewer rules and is structurally simpler. Interestingly, the Great Order is also the school that led to the Great Vehicle, which establishes the Great Vehicle, and not the Old School, which traces its origin to the Elders (Sthavira), as the mainstream tradition.

[38] Cf. Laozi, Tao Te Ching, chaps. 5, 45.

The late date of the Vinaya is indicated by the fact that it assumes the existence of a settled monastic establishment, whereas most of the early monastics were wanderers. Initially there was no Vinaya, and the monastics lived together in harmony, under the enlightened guidance of the Buddha. However, as time passed the order grew and different situations arose that necessitated the Buddha to establish various rules, each rule being declared in response to a specific situation. *Thus, the Vinaya is situational.* These rules were supposed to have been recited by Upali at the First Buddhist Council, about 400 BCE, and must have included the Patimokkha (lit. 'towards emancipation'). This is the shortest and is universally accepted as the oldest stratum of the Vinaya. This collection of rules was recited at the order's new and full moon meetings (called uposathas), originally the eve of the soma sacrifice. Although it is common in many Buddhist traditions today to regard those who follow more rules as being spiritually superior to those who follow fewer rules, in fact Mahakassapa, who convened the First Buddhist Council after the passing of the Buddha, declared that more rules are indicative of inferior attainment, recalling the tradition that originally there were no rules, which is also a matter of logic.

THE PATIMOKKHA

The Patimokkha is part of the 'Classification of Rules' (suttavibhanga). The Patimokkha is the basic code of monastic discipline, consisting in the Old School version of 227 rules for monks and 311 rules for nuns. The eighty-four extra rules for nuns were intended to avoid the inevitable decline of the order from 1,000 to 500 years due to the ordination of women. That the Buddha instituted this regime is doubted by scholars, but it is clear that the compilers of the Pali Canon, especially the later collections (nikayas), were intensely and explicitly misogynistic. The year 600 CE corresponds to the rise of the bodhisattva path. According to the the Pali Canon, after 500 years, the world no longer contains the Buddha's revelatory potency, and thus the attainment of full arahantship in its original sense ceases. This became the basis of a theory of five 500 year periods of progressive devolution. Today we are coming up to the 2,500th anniversary of the Buddha's passing, which is the midpoint of the Buddha's 5,000 year dispensation (sasana), and thus another crucial transitional moment in the historical development and renewal of

Buddhism, corresponding to the Dharma Transmission to the West, a.k.a. the Unified Vehicle (Ekayana).[39]

The rules of the Patimokkha are organized according to the penalty for each rule, from greatest to least severity, including Defeat, Formal Meeting, Confession with Forfeiture, Confession, and Verbal Acknowledgement, followed by the Rules of Training. The most serious of these is, of course, expulsion from the order for life (Defeat). These are similar to the Four Restraints, which appear to be the original set of rules, i.e., abstaining from killing, stealing, lying, and sex, to which drinking alcohol was added about 8 years after the Enlightenment. In the Patimokkha these are sex, stealing, murder, and, interestingly, lying about one's spiritual realization. The latter must have been a point of contention in the early order, which clearly had a concept of progressive attainment. Rules regarding sex also appear frequently throughout the Patimokkha. We also know from the Vinaya that the requirement of chastity was a significant problem for the early male monastics, like other religious orders with similar demands. In fact, there are twenty-four pages of "hitherto untranslated passages" in Vol. 1 of Horner's English translation of the Vinaya that are so obscene that they were left untranslated for many years, now happily translated and freely available for all to read.

I do not propose to list all of the rules that Buddhist monastics adopted in order to maintain the decorum, modesty, and restraint (vinaya) of the original order, but I will list a few of the more interesting ones, including agitating for a schism; rejecting criticism; rejecting money and trade; avoiding wrongful speech, including lying; not to dig or destroy plants; not to pour water containing insects on the ground or use water containing living beings; to eat only in the morning (drinking non-alcoholic drinks seems to be ok); avoiding the military; not drinking alcohol; not killing; not to ordain anyone under 20 years old (19 in Western terms since Buddhists count age from conception); and not to affirm that

[39] This is also 1,200 years after the appearance of Padmasambhava, the Second Buddha, accepted by Tibetans as the emanation or manifestation of the historical Buddha, who in turn appeared 1,200 years after the Buddha's passing, as well as the culmination of the Age of Science, a.k.a. the "sword interval" (satthantarakappa), which began in 1757, followed by the manifestation of Shambhala in the 25th century, under the direction of Maitreya, the Future Buddha, who will establish a Golden Age of 2,160 years, corresponding to the so-called Age of Aquarius, beginning in 2424 CE. This is my own synthesis of various traditions.

sex is not an obstacle to realization. The specificity of the last rule is rather interesting, strongly suggesting that there must have been such a teaching among at least some Buddhists. There were also other teachings like this, including the belief that monks engaged in romantic trysts with "celestial maidens" (Ginsburg's "visionary Indian angels"?). The orthodox rejected these assertions, of course.

The order was decentralized and self-governing. Each community of monastics would meet at the new and full moons to recite the rules, and purify the order of any infractions. Violations of the rules were settled by means of confession or confrontation, including excommunication in extreme cases. Each monastic lived with a preceptor, whose role was to train the monk, who in turn held their preceptor to the highest spiritual standard. It must have been a tightly knit, rather communistic system of mutual vigilance and control. Judging from the Pali Canon itself, disputes and appeals to the Buddha were common, monks would implicate each other in perceived lapses of discipline, sex was a problem, and women were generally feared and disliked by the monks. But the Buddha made ordination easy. Any monk could initiate others into the order, thus the system tended to proliferate and become decentralized with increasingly speculative opinions and different interpretations that led to growing diversity and a compensatory demand for increasing conformity and even, as the order continued to consolidate itself as an organization after the passing of the Buddha, rigidity, until the system finally broke down after the Second Buddhist Council and split and eventually divided into the early Buddhist schools, the traditional number of which is 18 or 20.

In the Great Passing Discourse (Mahaparinirvana Sutta) Ananda asks the Buddha to make a statement to the order on who should lead the order after his passing, but the Buddha reprimands Ananda, and directs him to apply himself directly to the doctrine, "each one for himself."[40] The Buddha also declares that new rules may not be added to the Vinaya,[41] which is rather odd considering their situational character, and that the minor rules might be abrogated.[42] Nevertheless, after the Buddha's passing Mahakassapa convened the First Buddhist Council of 'the deserving' (arahants) to rehearse the true discipline and doctrine of the

[40] DN 16.2.9, 2.25f., 6.1.
[41] DN 16.1.6.
[42] DN 16.6.3.

Buddha. In the now large and decentralized Buddhist order only a small fraction must have been able to actually meet in the Saptaparni Cave, near present day Rajgir, where the arhants, traditionally but improbably reputed to number as many as five hundred, are supposed to have reprimanded Ananda, who had only just attained awakening the previous night, for encouraging the Buddha to allow the ordination of women. He was also reprimanded for not asking the Buddha the specific rules that might be abrogated. In response to these accusations, the council imposed eight extra rules, called the Heavy Rules (garudhamma), on the nuns, and decided to keep all of the rules of the Vinaya. In fact, the discourses suggest that these rules only numbered about 150. These issues continued to fester in the Buddhist order, however, even to the extent that the authority of the arhants was questioned. After the Second Buddhist Council, about 300 BCE, the order divided into two main streams, the conservative (sthavira, lit. 'elder') minority, who wanted to add new rules to the Vinaya in order to effect a more rigorous discipline, and the Great Order majority, who rejected the addition of new rules as schismatic in principle. The Great Order became the more speculative and metaphysical school, and rejected the absolute authority of the arhants in favour of individual aspiration to Buddhahood, the path of the bodhisattva, the 'awakening being,' which became the basis of the Great Vehicle. According to the Pali Canon, the Buddha taught the path of the arhant due to the personal limitations of his hearers, and almost didn't teach them at all.

In addition to the rules of the order, the Vinaya includes historical accounts of the beginning of the Buddha's teaching career and the creation of the monastic order, including the rules of ordination and the order of nuns; the famous story of the wayward monk, Devadatta, who tried to enforce mandatory vegetarianism and other reforms on the order; and the First and Second Buddhist Councils, held about 400 and 300 BCE respectively. Many scholars think that the original Vinaya was compiled during the Second Buddhist Council.

THE ENLIGHTENMENT

The Vinaya includes an extremely interesting and detailed history of the period following the Awakening of the Buddha, constituting the opening

of the Great Chapter, in Vol. IV of Horner's translation.[43] The Buddha, having been fully awakened, was staying at Uruvela, on the bank of the river Neranjara, at the foot of the Bo-tree, known as the Tree of Awakening. This is present-day Bodhgaya, located in the Indian state of Bihar. The Buddha sat in the traditional yogic cross-legged posture, immobile for seven full days, clearly in a state of yogic ecstasy. Apparently at the end of this period of seven days, during the night, the Buddha discovered what is known as the doctrine of interdependent origination (paticcasamuppada), during the first watch of the night. Thus he understood the "causal uprising" of old age, dying, grief, sorrow, lamentation, suffering, dejection, and despair (dukkha) from birth, becoming, grasping, craving, feeling, awareness or contact, the six sense spheres, psycho-physicality or name and shape, consciousness, habitual tendencies, and finally ignorance, the primary state of "no information" that is the root cause of involuntary rebirth (samsara), described as "thing with cause." Thus he realized the implication that by stopping or interrupting this sequence[44] one can escape the bondage of rebirth in the second watch, described as "destruction of cause." Finally, during the third watch of the night, culminating about 5 a.m., he experienced enlightenment, described as "the sun lighting up the sky."

I assume that everybody is familiar with this fundamental Buddhist doctrine. However, there are several points in this description that I would like to emphasize. First, we see the Buddha sitting in the traditional cross-legged posture which goes back to ancient Indus Valley civilization (3300–1300 BCE), thus identifying the fundamental Buddhist practice with yoga and even with Shiva (Pashupati). This is confirmed by his enjoyment of ecstasy in an immobile state of trance for seven days. Prolonged states of trance are associated with the practice of yoga even today. Second, we see the Buddha discovering the doctrine of interdependent origination in this state of trance, not during but after the initial Awakening, during the three watches of the night. The version of this doctrine that we find in the Vinaya is the fully worked out, twelvefold version, which we find elsewhere in the Pali Canon involving different numbers of stages, but all broadly similar. This culminates in the experience of Enlightenment,

[43] See 1–57.

[44] Specifically at the points of ignorance or craving, through the cultivation of wisdom or detachment respectively.

which occurs at the end of the week, after the Awakening. Thus, a clear distinction seems to be made between Awakening and Enlightenment. This is called the Talk on Awakening.

After the Buddha emerges from the contemplation of interdependent origination and his Enlightenment, he approaches from the Tree of Awakening to the Goatherds' Banyan tree, presumably nearby, where he sits for a further seven days. During this period, a brahman (lit. holy') putting on a show of chanting the sacred Sanskrit "seed" syllable, ह्रीँ , described by the translator as "superstitious," "arrogant," and "angry," asks the Buddha how one becomes a brahman, in this context clearly referring to a holy man. The Buddha, recognizing the brahman's poor character, tells him that he must give up evil, including putting on a show of holiness; impurity; and egotism; master the Veda (lit. 'knowledge'); and live a holy life, free of imperfections, including, according to the translator, passion, hatred, stupidity, pride, and false views. When the Buddha refers to the Veda here, he is clearly referring to gnosis, not the Brahmanic religion, which he clearly rejects. This is called the Talk at the Goatherds.

At the end of fourteen days, the Buddha approaches the Mucalinda tree, and sits cross-legged for another seven days, where he experiences supreme happiness, absolute truth (dharma), universal goodwill (metta), complete emotional detachment, and utter selflessness.

At the end of twenty-one days, the Buddha approaches the Rajayatana tree, where he sits cross-legged for another seven days, during which time, two merchants, called Tapussa and Bhallika, offer him barley-gruel and honey balls as a dharma offering (so he is clearly not entranced full-time). The merchants are so impressed by the Buddha that they become his lay disciples there and then, taking refuge in the Buddha and the Doctrine. This is called the Two Word Formula of ordination. This is the Talk at the Rajayatana.

After twenty-eight days in total, which is the period of one lunation, the Buddha returns to the Goatherds' Banyan tree. There he meditates in seclusion, reflecting that the doctrine, especially "causal uprising by way of cause," which leads to emancipation, is profound, hard to know, and beyond rational comprehension. He considers not teaching in an ignorant world consumed by craving, thus becoming a hermit buddha (pratyekabuddha). However, the Buddha realizes that the doctrine is intelligible to the learned, who have "little dust in their eyes," acute, good,

fearing evil karma and involuntary rebirth. Since they would benefit from hearing the truth, transcending death (amata), the Buddha experienced a change of heart. Like the lotus, which is undefiled by the water in which it grows, the Buddha resolves to teach the way of immortality to others, renouncing impurity, for the sake of the few who can comprehend and accept his doctrine. This is called the Talk on the Holy (brahma) Appeal.

The Buddha considers teaching this new doctrine to his first two teachers, Alara Kalama and Uddaka Ramaputta, but discovers that they had recently died. He resolves to travel to the Group of Five, i.e., Anna-Kondanna, Bhaddiya, Vappa, Mahanama, and Assaji, who accompanied the Buddha during his period of self-mortification, who were at that time living in the deer park at Isipatana, near Benares, a distance of about 200 km or forty hours by foot. On the road the Buddha comes upon a naked ascetic (ajivika) called Upaka, who was struck by the Buddha's radiant appearance, and asked him the name and doctrine of his teacher. The Buddha declares himself to be a world-victor, all-knowing, perfect, detached, self-realized, unique, supreme, awakened to emancipation, and free from mortality and time. But Upaka is not convinced. Shaking his head, he goes another way. Thus, the Buddha's first attempt at conversion failed.

Arriving at the Group of Five, the ascetics are also unconvinced by the Buddha's self-declaration, and ask how he can be awakened since he has given up the practice of extreme self-mortification, by which alone realization can be gained, but his charisma was such that they listened to his words. The Buddha declares to them that in order to attain realization they must give up the extremes of self-indulgence and self-mortification, declaring both to be dead ends. Rather, they should pursue a middle way, based on the Four Noble Truths of suffering, the cause of suffering, the stopping of suffering, and the Noble Path, which is eightfold, consisting of right view or insight, right thought or "thorough furthering," right speech, right action, right living, right endeavour, right mindfulness, and right concentration or equanimity, which resolve themselves into morality, meditation, and wisdom. By perfectly realizing this eightfold gnosis, enlightenment arises, with the cessation of involuntary rebirth. As a result of hearing the Buddha's speech alone, Kondanna realizes dharma vision, the essential insight that "whatever is of the nature to uprise, all that is of the nature to stop." Kondanna begs the Buddha for ordination into the as

yet non-existing order. The Buddha ordains Kondanna, using the words, "Come, monk, well taught is the doctrine. Fare the Brahma-faring for making an utter end of ill." As the Buddha continues teaching, first Vappa, then Bhaddiya, then Mahanama, and finally Assaji, also realize dharma vision and are ordained. Thus, the Buddhist order, originally consisting of five monastics, came into existence. This occurred about the year 355 BCE.

The Buddha continues to teach the monastics about non-self-identity (anatta), impermanence (avijja), suffering and detachment, by the realization of which one attains emancipation, and purely through this gnosis the Group of Five attain perfect emancipation.

Subsequent sections summarize the early history of the Buddhist order, including the going forth of Yasa, the talk on Mara, ordination by the three goings for refuge, the case of the group of friends of high standing, the five wonders, the famous disquisition on burning, in which the Buddha declares the world to be burning with desire (tanha), and the going forth of Sariputta and Moggallana. The Vinaya then returns to a discussion of the rules for uposatha days and monastic ordination.

THE TALK ON BURNING

The talk on burning is a famous early talk of the Buddha that he gave at a place called Gaya Head, shortly after leaving Uruvela. In this talk, the Buddha declares that everything is burning. The eye is burning, material shapes are burning, eye consciousness is burning, impingement on the eye consciousness is burning, feeling is burning, and so on for the ear, nose, tongue, tastes, body, and mind. The six senses are burning. They are burning with the fire of passion, hatred, and stupidity. Why are they burning? They are burning because of birth, ageing, dying, grief, sorrow, suffering, lamentation, and despair. Seeing this, the disciple of the noble ones disregards the eye, material shapes, consciousness, feelings, and so on for the other senses. Disregarding, he is dispassionate; through dispassion he is freed; in the state of emancipation the knowledge comes to be, "I am freed," and he comprehends, "Destroyed is birth, lived is the holy (brahma) life, done is what was to be done, there is no more of being such and such."

Interestingly, the Buddha also uses "burning" as a metaphor for the essential luminous nature that "shines" and "blazes," stating that recluses

and brahmans who violate the Four Restraints are "tarnished, dust-soiled, utter fools, shrouded in darkness."[45] Thus, the dust that obscures the eyes of the ignorant also obscures their inherent radiance.

THE FIRST BUDDHIST COUNCIL

Mahakassapa's lay name was Pippali. He was part of the Buddha's inner circle, with a reputation for asceticism. Mahakassapa was a brahman farmer who though married he and his wife had decided to embrace chastity. Being enlightened doesn't seem to result in unanimity of thought, and Mahakassapa and Ananda had a disputatious relationship. This came to a head when Mahakassapa was travelling along the road from Pava to Kusinara with his monastic entourage. While sitting beneath a tree a naked ascetic passed by from the direction of Kusinara. Mahakassapa asked about the Buddha and the ascetic told him that the recluse Gotama had passed in Kusinara. This precipitated a crisis in the community over the issue of rules. Some people thought that the rules should be liberalized, as the Buddha had said before he passed on. Mahakassapa saw this as a threat to the integrity of the order, and convened a council of the highest ranking members of the order in Rajagaha, during the rainy season following the passing of the Buddha,[46] including Ananda. Ananda was the last personal attendant of the Buddha. Ananda was still being only a learner. Interestingly, Mahakassapa didn't want other monastics to attend the council, according to the translator because had they done so Mahakassapa would have had to include them in the proceedings according to Buddhist law, so it appears that the First Buddhist Council was held in secret. That such a decision was made clearly shows that the Buddhist order was more diverse at the time of the Buddha's passing than the Pali Canon indicates. Mahakassapa and his entourage selected themselves to recite the doctrine and the discipline at the first council after the Buddha's passing, and Mahakassapa controlled the agenda by being the only one who asked all the questions, and their descendants enforced this orthodoxy, apparently, based on the text, against those who held more liberal views. Ananda seems to have been the odd man out. The night before the council was scheduled, in the middle of the month,

[45] Cullavagga XII, 295.

[46] This is supposed to have occurred three months after the passing of the Buddha. Since rainy season is June to September, this implies a date for the passing of March.

Ananda meditated on his body much of the night. Shortly before sunrise he began to lie down on his bed and as he did so, while not touching the earth, he spontaneously attained the perfection of arhantship, between lifting his feet off the ground and laying his head on the pillow, as the text states.

When the order was convened in the middle of the month, Mahakassapa appointed Upali, an early disciple of the Buddha, to recite the rules of the order, presumably based on the Patimokka. Mahakassapa then called on Ananda to recite the discourses, beginning with the discourses of the Digha Nikaya. However, when Ananda said that the Buddha had declared at the time of his passing – and thus a profoundly serious statement, practically equivalent to his last words – that the "lesser and minor rules of training may be abolished" after his passing, Ananda was unable to tell the council which specific rules the Buddha was referring to. As a result, there was dissension in the council. Mahakassapa opposed any changes to the rules on the grounds of public opinion, something that the Buddha also paid attention to, since the Buddhist order survived on gifts of food and property. Thus the council declined to change any rules. Interestingly, this dissension over the rules never dissipated, and about a hundred years later the Buddhist order split.

In addition, the council severely criticized Ananda, accusing him of wrong doing for not asking the Buddha which rules of training were lesser and minor. Ananda declined to admit that this was a legitimate offence, but in deference to the council confessed. Ananda was then accused in turn of stepping on the Buddha's robe; allowing women to honour the body of the Buddha after his passing, as a result of which his body was defiled by their tears; not entreating the Buddha to live longer for the sake of the world, despite a broad hint by the Buddha that he might do this; and convincing the Buddha to allow the ordination of women.

THE SECOND BUDDHIST COUNCIL

A century later the Vesali monastics promulgated ten points of Vinaya that allowed a number of questionable activities, consisting of

- storing salt in a horn;
- eating after midday;
- eating once and then going again to a village for alms;

- holding the Uposatha Ceremony with incomplete assemblies;
- carrying out official acts when the assembly is incomplete;
- following practices of local customs for robes;
- using gold and silver;
- drinking palm wine;
- sitting on spread mats without fringe;
- eating sour milk after the midday meal.

This led to a dispute between the Vesali monastics and the followers of one Yasa, apparently a follower of the tradition established by Mahakassapa. Each recited different discourses to defend their various views, which were finally resolved at the Valika monastery or the Gabled Hall in Vesali, at least according to the Pali tradition.

In the course of the aforementioned legalities a monastic named Revata is said to have visited the oldest monastic on earth, ordained (improbably) 120 years before,[47] called Sabbakamin, and to ask him about the Ten Points. Revata is an arhant who "abides" in goodwill, referring of course to the Buddhist practice also often called "loving-kindness." There is some suggestion that goodwill is the method or skilled means (upaya) by which he has attained perfection, which is a point of contention today. Richard Gombrich has argued that the practice of goodwill can lead to perfection, but this point is hotly disputed. Revata in turn asks Sabbakamin in what he abides. Sabbakamin's answer is extremely interesting. He says: "Because of abiding in the concept of emptiness do I, beloved, now abide in the fullness thereof." The translator gives as equivalent, "abiding in the sustained fruition of emptiness," based on the commentary to the Majjhima Nikaya. Sabbakamin further identifies 'emptiness' (sunnata) with "the abiding of great men," mahapurisas, referring (according to the translator) to buddhas; hermit buddhas; Thus Come Ones (tathagatas), who abide in 'thusness' or 'suchness' (tathata); and arhants. In other words, emptiness is the highest "abiding," which appears in the Pali Canon as a synonym for meditation, e.g., the "Tathagata's abiding," an exercise

[47] He is supposed to have shared the cell of Ananda, no doubt after his becoming the personal attendant of the Buddha 20 years after the Enlightenment of the Buddha at the age of 35 about 445 BCE. Ananda also outlived the Buddha by 20 years. This would put the Second Buddhist Council between 305 and 260 BCE, based on a date for the passing of the Buddha of 400 BCE.

which refers to mindfulness of the breath. The ultimacy of the meditation on emptiness is of course the fundamental premise of the Great Vehicle, especially the Utmost Yoga (Atiyoga) of Padmasambhava, known to the Tibetans as the Great Perfection (Dzogchen).

CONCLUSIONS

There are quite a few points of interest in the Vinaya that I will summarize.

- The oldest Vinaya is that of the Great Order, but is not one of the three Vinayas that are still followed by Buddhist monastics today.
- Scholars believe that all six extant vinayas share a common underlying presectarian tradition.
- The Vinaya is later than the discourses, even though it is placed first in the Pali Canon. However, it includes historical material related to the discourses.
- The Buddhist order split after the Second Buddhist Council (ca. 300 BCE) into two factions, a conservative faction that led to the current school of the Elders, and a more liberal school that led to the Great Vehicle. Current opinion leans to the view that the conservatives were the schismatic faction.
- Originally there was no Vinaya. The rules of the Vinaya were contingent on specific situations as they arose.
- The Buddha said that the lesser and minor rules of the Vinaya could be abrogated after his passing. In any case he indicated that the Vinaya tradition would only flourish for 500 years, due to the degeneration of the order.
- Considered as a spiritual practice, Vinaya is comparable to physical and mental restraint, which is the foundation of Yoga.
- The Buddha compares the order to the world ocean, and says that it is characterized by gradual training, full of treasures, and inhabited by great beings. Interestingly, these great beings include anti-gods (asuras) and serpents (nagas), despite the anti-gods' late Vedic association with evil. Serpents are traditional guardians of treasure, and are traditional enemies of the anti-gods. Interestingly, various disciples and other figures in Buddhist history have been identified as serpents.

- The Mahayana Precepts, a.k.a. Bodhisattva Precepts, are substantially similar to the Vinaya.
- The new and full moon meetings derive from the eve of the Vedic soma sacrifice, during which an entheogenic or psychedelic plant was imbibed by the ancient rishis. The 28-day period that the Buddha remained in the vicinity of the Tree of Awakening also reflects this lunar symbolism.
- The cross-legged posture of the Buddha derives from the ancient Indian practice of Yoga, which goes back to the figure of Pashupati, an early analogue of Shiva, during the Indus Valley civilization.
- After experimenting with extreme self-mortification, the Buddha definitely abandons asceticism and declares a middle way between the extremes of self-torture and self-indulgence, even acquiring a reputation for laxity.
- The Buddha appears to have had two primary spiritual experiences, consisting of Awakening and Enlightenment, separated by a week spent in an ecstatic state.
- The Buddha's experience of enlightenment produced a radiant appearance, mentioned elsewhere in the discourses and elsewhere positively associated with death, that could be perceived by others, as well as a charismatic quality that also influenced others consciously or unconsciously. Ananda also experienced this state the night before the First Buddhist Council.
- In the accounts of the Buddha's early talks we see his emphasis on the law of cause and effect, ignorance and desire as the causes of suffering and involuntary rebirth, gnosis and detachment as their cure, and the realization of impermanence as the means by which emancipation can be experienced in a blissful, non-temporal, perfect state of cessation.
- Gnosis is the essential means by which awakening ("dharma vision") is attained, and constitutes an essential and irreversible change of state.
- Shortly before passing the Buddha urged the order to take the doctrine as their leader, "each for himself," and declined to appoint a successor. He also said that "the lesser and minor rules" of the Vinaya could be abrogated.

THE MAHAYANA PRECEPTS (BUDDHA NET SUTRA)

Note: In East Asian Mahayana the minor precepts are not regarded as binding.

Major Precepts

1. On Killing
2. On Stealing
3. On Sexual Misconduct
4. On Lying and False Speech
5. On Selling Alcoholic Beverages
6. On Broadcasting the Faults of the Assembly
7. On Praising Oneself and Disparaging Others
8. On Stinginess and Abuse
9. On Anger and Resentment
10. On Slandering the Triple Jewel

Minor Precepts

1. Disrespect toward Teachers and Friends
2. On Consuming Alcoholic Beverages
3. On Eating Meat
4. On Five Pungent Herbs
5. On Not Teaching Repentance
6. Failing to Request the Dharma or Make Offerings
7. Failing to Attend Dharma Lectures
8. On Turning Away from the Mahayana
9. On Failure to Care for the Sick
10. On Storing Deadly Weapons
11. On Serving as an Emissary
12. On Unlawful Business Undertakings
13. On Slander and Libel
14. On Starting Wildfires
15. Teaching Non-Mahayana Dharma
16. Unsound Explanation of the Dharma
17. On Exacting Donations
18. On Serving as an Inadequate Master
19. On Double-Tongued Speech

20. Failure to Liberate Sentient Beings
21. On Violence and Vengefulness
22. Arrogance and Failure to Request the Dharma
23. On Teaching the Dharma Grudgingly
24. Failure to Practice Mahayana Teachings
25. Unskilled Leadership of the Assembly
26. Accepting Personal Offerings
27. Accepting Discriminatory Invitations
28. Issuing Discriminatory Invitations
29. On Improper Livelihoods
30. On Handling Business Affairs for the Laity
31. Rescuing Clerics Along with Sacred Objects
32. On Harming Sentient Beings
33. On Watching Improper Activities
34. Temporary Abandoning of the Bodhi Mind
35. Failure to Make Great Vows
36. Failure to Make Resolutions
37. Traveling in Dangerous Areas
38. Order of Seating Within the Assembly
39. Failure to Cultivate Merits and Wisdom
40. Discrimination in Conferring the Precepts
41. Teaching for the Sake of Profit
42. Reciting the Precepts to Evil Persons
43. Thoughts of Violating the Precepts
44. Failure to Honor the Sutras and Moral Codes
45. Failure to Teach Sentient Beings
46. Preaching in an Inappropriate Manner
47. On Regulations Against the Dharma
48. On Destroying the Dharma

APPENDIX

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GLOSSARY

abhidhamma. higher doctrine
ajivika. religious mendicant
amata. ambrosia
anatta. non-ego
arahant. honourable
asura. anti-god
atiyoga. ultimate yoga
avijja. ignorance
brahma. holy
buddha. wise
dhamma. doctrine
dukkha. suffering
dzogchen. great perfection (or: great completion)
ekayana. unified vehicle
garudhamma. heavy rule
mahaparinirvana. great passing
mahasamghika. great order
mahavagga. great chapter
mahayana. great vehicle

metta. goodwill
naga. serpent
nirvana. emancipation
nikaya. collection
niyama. mental restraint
parivara. appendix
paticcasamuppada. interdependent origination
pitaka. division
pratyekabuddha. hermit buddha
samsara. rebirth
sangha. order
sasana. dispensation
sati. attention
satthatarakappa. age of swords or science
sthavira. elder
sunnata. emptiness
sutta. discourse (also: rule)
suttavibhanga. classification of rules
tanha. desire
tathagata. 'Thus Come One.'
theravada. doctrine of the elders
upaya. skilled means
veda. gnosis
vinaya. discipline
yama. physical restraint

7
Gotama's Quest
The Life of the Buddha

PART 1

CONCEPTION TO ENLIGHTENMENT

The Shakyan Republic

Gotama, as he is consistently called all through the Pali Canon, referring to his family or clan name, was born in Lumbini, in what is now Nepal, in the traditional territory of the Shakyan tribe. "Shakya" means "capable, able." The Shakyan region was an independent tribal confederacy, with its capital in Kapilavastu, but it was politically subject to Kosala, its powerful neighbour to the west, and some Buddhist texts refer to the Buddha as Kosalan. The Shakyans were notorious for their pride and love of independence. Kosala waged a war of genocide against the Shakyans towards the end of the Buddha's life. Chinese pilgrims visiting the site centuries later described it as desolate. Kosala itself was subsequently annexed by the Magadha Empire. The language of the Pali Canon is sometimes described as Magadhan.

Gotama's family were members of the prestigious Ikshsvaku dynasty, a.k.a. as the Suryavamsa or Solar Dynasty.

Manu, the first human being and legislator of mankind, was an ancestor of the Solar Dynasty, much as Moses was an ancestor to the Jews. In the Buddhist view, this dynasty was founded in prehistoric times by Maha Sammata. The texts say that the original government of the world was

democratic (since there were no rulers yet), and Gotama's father was an elected chieftain in a sort of aristocratic proto-democracy, not dissimilar from Socratic Greece, who was a contemporary of the Buddha. After regarding Suddhodhana as a monarch or an oligarch, scholars now see him as an elected chieftain. At the time of the Buddha, the fragile values of quasi-democracy coexisted with a world of aggressive hereditary monarchs and military dictators hungry to tax the new wealth of mercantilism, frequent wars of annexation, widespread lawlessness and brigandage, and terrible punishments for crimes, including mutilation, blinding, impaling, strangling, and beheading. Trade was extensive but travel was dangerous. At the time of Gotama, Brahmanism, which came from the west, had still not deeply penetrated north-east India, and the samana counterculture was widespread. Shakya itself did not have a caste system, although in countries where the caste system was established the Buddha is always identified as a member of the Kshatriya (Pali khattiya) or military caste that also constituted the political class.

The father of Gotama was Suddhodana. Suddodhana's father was Sihahanu. Sihahanu's father was Jayasena. Suddhodhana was known for his prowess in warfare and sword play. He was also known to be a just and righteous ruler.

The mother of Suddhodhana was Kaccana. She was a member of the Koliyan clan. The Koliyans ruled the region to the east of the Rohini River, whereas the Shakyas governed the west side.

The mother of Gotama was Maya. Her father, Suppabuddha, was the king of Devadaha. Maya was Suddhodhana's cousin. Suddhodhana had another wife, Pajapati, Maya's younger sister, who raised Gotama after Maya's death. Both Maya and Pajapati were the daughters of Suppabuddha.

The Shakyans and the Koliyans were both vassal states of the Kosala kingdom to the west. The Shakyans and Koliyans had intermarried since ancient times in order to maintain the purity of their blood lines, and were the two most prominent families in the region.

According to the dominant tradition, Suddhodhana and Maya lived together chastely for 20 years, at which time Maya became pregnant and gave birth to Gotama.

The Conception of the Buddha

Maya was the daughter of Suddhodana's uncle, and therefore his cousin. Kapilavastu (probably present-day Tiraulakot), Lumbini (present-day Rumindei), where the Buddha was born, and Devadaha, are all located in the Rupandehi district of Nepal.

The 3rd century (BCE) brick-palace complex located at Tiraulakot is believed to be based on an original wood structure, and is 1,300 × 1,700 m square (about 546 acres). This accords well with the statement of the Chinese pilgrim Xuangang, who stated that the royal precinct of the city was 14 or 15 li in circumference (about 400 or 500 acres). An alternative site is Piprahwa, across the border in India, which seems to be less favoured by scholars.

Interestingly, Kapilavastu is named after its founder, the philosopher Kapila who lived 200 years earlier and is regarded as the founder of Samkhya. Like Kapila, the Buddha emphasized meditation as a technique for removing suffering, regarded the Vedic gods as subject to limitations and conditions, and disliked Brahmanic ritual and doctrines.

In accordance with the custom of the time, still practised in Nepal, Maya left her husband's house late in her pregnancy to deliver at the house of her parents in Devadaha. Although Maya was travelling by carriage, she was accompanied by an entourage, so it seems unlikely that she made better time than average walking speed. The trip would have taken roughly a week, but she never got to Devadaha.

Stopping in Lumbini, it appears that Maya was overcome by the exertion, and in the heat of the afternoon she went into labour in a park of sal trees. Gotama was therefore born prematurely, despite the claim of the texts that Maya's gestation period was exactly 10 lunar months. Alternatively, Hajime Nakamura has suggested that Maya travelled back to Lumbini for a ritual purification in the baths there, but the texts clearly imply that Maya stopped at Lumbini on the way to Devadaha. The texts also state that the sal trees came into bloom about this time, which suggests the month of late March or April, not mid-May as popularly believed. Exhausted, Maya returned to Kapilavastu with her newborn son, Siddhartha. Thus, Gotama's conception may be placed in June (associated with high summer – the time of traditional midsummer, a solar holiday that places his conception about the time of the summer solstice).

It is said that when she conceived, Queen Maya experienced a dream in which four spiritual beings (representing the four elements?) transported her to Lake Anotta, a mythical Himalayan lake, where she was ritually bathed and then impregnated through her side by a great white elephant.

This lake is now associated with Lake Manasarovar at the foot of Mount Kailash, located in mid-western Tibet just over the border from Nepal, north-west of Kapilavastu. This dream was held to portend the birth of a great being.

The Birth of the Buddha

When Gotama was born, Asita, a wandering hermit ascetic, predicted that Gotama would become a buddha. Five days after the birth, at Gotama's naming ceremony, seven brahmans predicted that Gotama would become either a universal ruler or a universal teacher. However, Kondanna, the youngest brahman there, alone predicted that Gotama would become a buddha. These predictions appear to have been based on physiognomy. According to later tradition, Gotama was then given the name Siddhattha, "wish-fulfilled" or "he who accomplishes the goal." Two days later, Maya died.

A great man is supposed to manifest thirty-two significant bodily signs. Although some authors emphasize the supernatural character of these signs, most of them are not difficult to visualize. The bodily signs include flat feet; long-slender fingers; pliant hands and feet; fine webs on the toes and fingers (which in extreme cases exists as a medical condition known as syndactyly); large heels; arched insteps; athletic thighs; long arms; a small penis; dark, curly hair; soft, smooth, golden skin; rounded soles, palms, shoulders, and crown; a large, ample, muscular torso; erect and upright posture; full, round shoulders; white, even, close teeth; a large jaw; ample saliva; a long and broad tongue; a deep and resonant voice; deep blue eyes; long, thick eyelashes; a tuft of white hair between the eyebrows; and a large cranium.

Clairvoyants may also discern wheels on the soles of the feet, a ten-foot aura, and forty teeth – eight more than what is usual for humans, but the maximum number for mammals. Despite these unusual characteristics, Gotama is described as not exceptional, though handsome, in appearance. There is a story in which a wandering ascetic met the Buddha in a barn one night. They spent the night talking together, but only in the morning

did the ascetic realize with whom he was speaking. Although this is widely interpreted to mean that the physical appearance of the Buddha was not exceptional, it was night. Of course, the redactors of the Pali Canon in their enthusiasm generally exaggerate the wealth and power of the Buddha's family, the beauty of the Buddha and his male monastics, and the size of the sangha. The Buddha was probably refined, slightly androgynous, and thoughtful in appearance. Given his military upbringing and later self-mortifications, he was probably physically fit and strong.

The Buddha's Youth and Marriage

Suddhodhana wanted his son to become a world ruler and not a spiritual man, so from birth Gotama was raised in an atmosphere of opulence, as well as receiving the education proper to a member of the military caste. Gotama's education appears in his interest in politics and his broad knowledge of social history and international matters.

As a young child, Gotama experienced a taste of realization while he was sitting under a rose-apple tree beside a field where his father was performing a ceremonial plowing. This early experience of meditation was crucial in his realization of enlightenment two decades later, as we shall see.

Gotama was extremely hedonistic, and lived for the 4 months of the rainy season in the female quarters, entertained by female musicians. This behavior was somewhat contrary to Indian norms, which valued chastity and manliness, leading to the accusation of effeminacy later on.

Subsequently he was married at the age of 16 (some sources say 19) to his cousin, Yasodhara (a.k.a. Bimba, Bimbadevi, Bhaddakacca, Bhaddakaccana, or Rahulamata), the daughter of Suppabuddha and Pamita, the sister of the Buddha' s father. Yasodhara was the same age as Gotama. Gotama may have had two other wives too. The Tibetan Vinaya mentions Gopa and Mrigaja.[48]

Although the popular view is that Gotama abandoned his station, family, wife, and child spontaneously shortly after the birth of his son, Rahula ("fetter"), in disgust for a night of carousing, Rahula's name itself suggests that Gotama's decision was the result of a process of reflection.

[48] The Buddhacarita mentions "wives" (5:41).

The Sarvastivadins have an alternative explanation of the meaning of the name Rahula, which is "eclipse," but since Rahu, the eclipse deity, is also an ill omen, the implication is similar. The texts also refer to the bodhisattva's progressive realization of the principles of interconnectedness (paticcasamuppada), including the five aggregates of the self; impermanence (anicca); and suffering (dukkha) before his renunciation. Gotama must have informed his parents about these feelings, because a sutta says that they wept and tried to convince him to stay. Therefore, he left home against his parent's wishes, a violation of Vedic norms, which frowned upon renunciation by the young in any case.[49]

The Renunciation

The mainstream tradition has it that Gotama left his home at the age of 29, after 13 years of marriage, but there is some support in the suttas for the view that he was still a youth, "a boy in the first phase of life," which would make him about 19 years of age according to the Vedic theory of the four stages of life. This tradition is preserved by the Nichiren tradition. According to this view, he attained enlightenment at the age of 30. However, most texts state that he attained enlightenment at the age of 35. Asians, however, count life as beginning at conception, not birth, and give their age accordingly, so allowance must also be made for this difference.

The immediate cause of Gotama's renunciation was his realization of the universality of sickness and death. The Buddha says that this realization destroyed the vanity of his youth. Inquiring into the causes of this condition, the Buddha realized that we are all born into a dangerous and violent world. We compete to survive, and in the process we cause suffering and we suffer ourselves. This suffering is inherent in life itself and cannot be escaped. "Life eats life" is the original Vedic insight. Even if we succeed in realizing a life of relative happiness, we all grow old, suffer, and die. Nothing is permanent. Consequently, Gotama formulated the

[49] The Buddhacarita (Acts of the Buddha), the first full biography of the Buddha, a post-canonical Sanskrit poem written in the early 2nd century, about 150 years after the Pali Canon was committed to writing (its author, the Mahasanghiika ascetic Asvaghosa, lived from 80 to 150 CE), but clearly incorporating earlier traditions, states explicitly that Gotama did not renounce the home life for some time after the birth of Rahula (2:54) and asked his father for permission to leave the home life, which he refused (5:28).

desire to attain "the unborn, unaging, unfailing, deathless, sorrowless, undefined cessation of bondage," and became increasingly dissatisfied with the household life so that he named his only son, Rahula, "fetter."

When Gotama left home, he abandoned his station, family, wife, and young child for a life of homeless wandering. He gave up his patrimony and possessions, shaved his hair, and exchanged his rich clothes for the ochre rags of a samana.

At first he lived in a cave on the eastern slope of the hill of Pandava, near Rajagaha in Magadha, and begged for his food on the streets of the city. This was the life of a samana, a homeless ascetic. By this time – roughly 450 BCE – the samana counterculture was already a century old. In a time of social fragmentation and spiritual and philosophical inquiry, the samanas were an established institution of northeast India. While not universally embraced, they were tolerated and often sought out for their insight, even in matters of secular policy such as war, much as they are today in India and Nepal.

Gotama's Search

Gotama's quest, traditionally stated to have taken 6 years, passed through three distinct stages before resulting in the enlightenment that he sought. He meditated alone in the forest, overcoming the emotion of fear. He studied meditation with two meditation masters, Alara Kalama and Udaka Ramaputta.

Finally, he spent an extended period with the Group of Five, practising austerities. When that almost killed him, he was abandoned by his companions and settled down in the forest to meditate, once more alone.

Alara Kalama

Alara (Arada) Kalama was a brahman hermit-saint who lived and taught a kind of proto-Samkhya yogic meditation near Rajagaha. After mastering the doctrine he proceeded to practice, and attained the plane of nothingness, the second highest plane of samsara. This was the highest state of consciousness that Alara had attained. Alara offered to accept Gotama as an equal partner, but Gotama was dissatisfied with this state and left Alara.

Udaka Ramaputta

Next Gotama studied under Udaka Ramaputta, a Jain hermit, saint, and yogic meditation teacher. Udaka was the son or disciple of Ramaputta. Under Udaka, Gotama attained the plane of neither perception nor non-perception (non-duality), which Udaka himself had not yet attained. Udaka offered to make Gotama the head of his sangha, but Gotama was dissatisfied with this attainment and left Udaka.

Note that by moving from a Brahman to a Jain teacher Gotama was clearly moving away from Brahmanism, from astika (orthodox) to a nastika (heterodox) philosophical orientation.

The Group of Five

When Gotama left his home at Kapilavastu, Kondanna, the youngest brahman who alone had predicted that Gotama would become a buddha, also renounced the household life, accompanied by four others – Bhaddiya, Vappa, Mahanama, and Assaji.

After he left Udaka, Gotama travelled to Uruvela (now known as Bodh Gaya) where he joined the group of five in the practices of extreme asceticism, including living and sleeping in charnel grounds, exposing the body to the elements, intense meditation, controlling and holding the breath, and near-starvation. A stock description of the practices of ascetics found frequently throughout the Pali Canon includes nakedness or rough clothing; rejecting conventions; licking one's hands; not coming or stopping when asked; not accepting gifts or invitations; avoiding "pollution," including anything associated with the householder life, especially women and sex; eating next to no food; no meat; no alcohol; eating grass and dung; living only on windfalls; pulling out the hairs of one's head and beard; standing or squatting continuously; sleeping on spikes; and frequent bathing [sic].

After several years of these practices, Gotama was on the verge of dying.

> My body reached a state of extreme emaciation. Because of eating so little my limbs became like the jointed stems of creepers or bamboo; my backside became like a buffalo's hoof; my backbone, bent or straight, was like corded beads; my jutting and broken rafters of an old house; the gleam of my eyes sunk deep in their sockets was like the gleam of water seen deep down at the bottom of a deep well.

One day, while sitting beneath a pipal (some sources say banyan) tree by the river Neranjara, near Uruvela, a girl, named Sujata, from Senani, the village across the river, came to offer some rice gruel to the tree spirit as thanks for answering her prayers for a husband and a son. Gotama accepted her offering, followed by a bath in the river. When his companions saw him thus eating, drinking, and consorting with a girl, they abandoned him, declaring that he had returned to the effeminate life of his youth.

PART 2

ENLIGHTENMENT TO PARINIRVANA

Enlightenment

Having now rejected the meditations on nothingness and neither perception nor non-perception (non-duality) and the painful and self-destructive austerities of the Group of Five, Gotama cast his mind about for what to do. He recalled an experience that he had had as a child sitting under a rose-apple tree watching his father engage in a ceremonial ploughing. He recalled the sensation of bliss that he experienced then, and asked himself whether this pleasure might be the key to enlightenment? It appears from the texts that Gotama had previously rejected this experience because it was pleasurable, but now, he reasoned, the pleasure of meditation is not unwholesome. Then he realized that the pursuit of bliss is incompatible with bodily torment and emaciation, and resolved to regain his health.

Ironically, Gotama has come full circle – from a life of hedonism through a life of pain he now reconsiders his attitude to pleasure in a new light. So he took some boiled rice and bread. The texts present this process as virtually instantaneous, but after years of deprivation and abstinence it is clear that this must have taken some time. So he lived alone for some period of time beside the river Neranjara, meditating and begging for alms in Senani.

The night before he attained enlightenment, Gotama had five dreams: in which the earth was his couch and the Himalayas his pillow; a creeper grew out of his navel and stood touching the clouds; white grubs with black heads crawled up his legs from his feet to his knees and covered

them; four birds of different colours flew to him from the four quarters and, landing at his feet, became white; finally, arising, he walked upon a huge mountain of dirt without being defiled. According to the texts, these dreams implied that he would become a World Teacher, teaching the Noble Eightfold Path, with many lay disciples [sic], that all the castes would become as one, and that he would live in the world but would not be defiled by it.

The next day, Gotama meditated as usual and attained the fourth jhana state, characterized by perfect equanimity with neither pleasure nor pain. Then, during the first third of the night, Gotama realized the truth of past lives. During the second third of the night, he experienced the "divine eye" and realized the truth of karmic cause and effect. Finally, during the third third of the night – for this night he did not sleep – Gotama realized perfect freedom from the three taints – sensual desire, being, and ignorance. At dawn, traditionally about 5 a.m., Gotama realized his enlightenment, and became a buddha. According to tradition, this occurred during the night of the Full Moon in late April or May (Indian month of Vaisakha). Many modern scholars now think this occurred about 445 BCE.

According to the texts, the Buddha, as we will now call him, remained in a state of transcendent ecstasy for a full week, insentient to the world, seated cross-legged and motionless under the Bodhi tree. During the final night of the seven, the Buddha meditated on the doctrine of interconnectedness (paticcasamuppada) in forward, reverse, and forward and reverse order, and thus emerged from his trance. He remained in the vicinity of the Bodhi tree for another six weeks, for a total of seven weeks or 49 days.

First Sermons

After attaining enlightenment, the Buddha hesitated to teach, fearing that he would not be understood. But Sahampati, a Great Brahma, appeared to the Buddha and entreated him to teach for the salvation of the world and so that Sahampati himself could earn merit. The Buddha reflected that the dust of worldliness obscured the sight of some people less than others, and that he would teach for their benefit, knowing that the dharma would be lost on most people and, once articulated, fall into degeneration like all things.

The Buddha's first thought was to teach Alara Kalama and Udaka Ramaputta, his first teachers, but when he learned of their death he resolved to travel to the Deer Park in Isipatana, outside Benares. On the way he met a wandering ascetic in the road, named Upaka. Upaka was an ajivika, a heterodox philosophy characterized by a strict fatalism in which past karma could not be destroyed. Future karma was also fixed, but could be accelerated by ascetic practices similar to those practised by the Jains, and thus could be used to achieve a state of emancipation. Like the Jains, some Ajivikas went about naked. They were also anti-caste and "a-theistic," but some worshipped Shiva and Vishnu. Voluntary suicide was also practised. The ajivikas reached the height of their popularity during the 2nd century CE, but went into decline and by the 13th century had almost completely disappeared. Upaka, impressed by the Buddha's physical appearance, asked the Buddha which teacher or teaching he followed. When the Buddha told him that he was self-realized, Upaka shook his head and replied, "Would that it were so," and passed on by another way. So the Buddha's first attempt at conversion had failed.

When the Buddha arrived at Benares, the Group of Five looked at him askance, but there was something about him that caused them to think twice, and they allowed him to sit with them. At first they were suspicious, but as he spoke the dawn of realization arose in their minds and they were converted. Kondanna was the first to attain arhantship, after meditating for five days – two days less than the seven days that is usually prescribed as the minimum requirement.

The first sermons of the Buddha included "Setting Rolling the Wheel of Dharma" and "The Discourse on the Not-self Characteristic." In "Setting Rolling the Wheel of Dharma," the Buddha declares the doctrine of the Middle Way, which he identifies with the Noble Eightfold Path. He then declares the Four Noble Truths and the three phases of penetration – knowing, abandoning, and realizing, including maintaining the realization of them.

In "The Discourse on the Not-self Characteristic," the Buddha declares the doctrines of non-self-identity (anatta), impermanence (anicca), and dispassion or detachment, which arises spontaneously as a result of the realization of the first two principles. As a result of the last discourse, all of the members of the Group of Five became liberated arhants.

The Creation of the Sangha

The first person outside the Group of Five to accept the new teaching was an ordinary merchant's son named Yasa. Yasa experienced a spiritual awakening in the middle of the night and, overcome by disgust for the householder life, left his home near Isipatana. He came upon the Buddha in Deer Park, who, having awoken early, as was his wont, appears to have been practising walking meditation in the open. Yasa was distraught. The Buddha taught him dharma. Although he had a wife, Yasa must have been young, as his father the merchant came looking for him. Yasa became the first person outside the Group of Five to join the sangha. In addition, he became the personal attendant of the Buddha, and his father became the first householder to accept the dharma. Subsequently, both the merchant's and Yasa's wife also converted, becoming the first female adherents of the Buddha. This story appears in the Vinaya, and contradicts the story in the suttas, now regarded as invented by many scholars, in which Ananda persuades the Buddha to ordain his mother's sister and his step mother, Prajapati, against his better judgment. The dharma spread, starting with four prominent merchant families in Benares, friends of Yasa. At that time there was no ordination formula. The Buddha simply said to the candidate, "Come, the dharma is well proclaimed. Lead the holy life for the complete ending of suffering." Also through Yasa, fifty more joined the sangha, until the number of monastics totalled sixty-one. Interestingly, the Vinaya seems to regard everyone who joined the sangha at that time as an arhant. Having taught them the dharma, the Buddha sent them out to wander and bring the good news of the dharma to all those able to receive it. The Buddha himself went to a place called Senanigama in Uruvela.

Soon so many were seeking ordination that it became burdensome for the Buddha to receive the candidates himself, and he authorized the monastics to admit applicants to the sangha by the simple formula of Taking Refuge in the Dharma (later elaborated into the Triple Jewel, consisting of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha, or, in the Tibetan tradition, Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, and Lama). Thus, the Buddha established the sangha as a decentralized order of monastics, quite unlike the hierarchical system that we find in many Buddhist organizations today.

The Fire Sermon

Sometime after his enlightenment, the Buddha travelled to Gayasisa (near Gaya), where he addressed the monastics in the famous "Fire Sermon." The Buddha famously declares that "all is burning" with the cravings of desirous attachment. This is a disease for which he prescribes "delivery from the taints by not clinging" as the cure. Thence he travelled to Rajagaha, the capital city of Magadha, where the First Buddhist Council would be held 40-odd years later.

Here King Bimbisara honoured the Buddha and presented the sangha with the gift of the Bamboo Grove, a place described as close to the city and accessible, but lonely, quiet, and hard to find, for the Buddha and his monks to spend the rainy season together. But the Buddha was not popular everywhere. Some people complained that the Buddha was promoting childlessness and widowhood and obliterating the clans. Most of the time the monastics lived in woods, at the foot of trees, under overhanging rocks, in ravines, hillside caves, charnel grounds, jungle thickets, in the open, or on heaps of straw.

Seven years after Gotama's renunciation, so about a year after the enlightenment, the Buddha's father, Suddodhana, heard of his son's success and sent messengers inviting him to return to Kapilavastu. Many of these messengers joined the sangha. According to tradition, he converted his father to the dharma, who died an arhant some 4 years later. Therefore, it appears that his father was about 60 when he died (20 + 29 + 7 + 4). The Buddha also converted his half-brother, Nanda, on the day he was to be married. The texts say that the Buddha lured him away and that Nanda joined the sangha more out of regard for the Buddha than personal inclination, and continued to cling to luxury even as a monastic.

This was also the famous occasion on which Pajapati sent Rahula to the Buddha to ask him for his patrimony. This is often misinterpreted to refer to the crown of kingship, but this interpretation is not feasible since the Shakyans elected their chief (and the chief elected subsequent to Suddhodhana does not appear to have been related to the Gotamas). The Buddha, however, directed Sariputta to ordain Rahula as a novice monk. Presumably Rahula's ordination preceded the rule that a novice must be 15 years old.

The Buddha returned to Kapilavastu 4 years later, on the occasion of his father's death. It was also at this time that the Buddha formally established

the order of nuns, the bhikkunisangha, although it is clear from other texts, already cited, that female monastics were admitted to the sangha since early on. This has led most scholars to doubt that story that the Buddha did not want to establish a female monastic order and had to be persuaded to do so by Ananda, responding to the entreaty of Pajapati, who made the Buddha admit that women were equally capable of attaining nirvana as men. Scholars also doubt the misogynistic diatribes that mar the texts of the Pali Canon as the inventions of anonymous male monastic redactors.

The Life of the Sangha

The sangha expanded, including monastics who never knew the Buddha, as monastics ordained new monastics in an ever-expanding circle. Of course, such expansion also meant that not all monastics were equally worthy. There were many reasons that one might want to join the sangha. But through the practices of dharma talk, uposatha, and the rains retreat, the sangha retained its unity for at least a 100 years after the Buddha's passing. The Majjhima Nikaya preserves a nice description of the daily life of the sangha:

> Lord, as to that, whichever of us returns first from the village with alms food gets the seats ready, sets out the water for drinking and for washing and puts the refuge bucket in its place. Whichever of us returns last eats any food left over if he wishes; otherwise he throws it away where there is no grass or drops it into water where there is no life. He puts away the seats and the water for drinking and for washing. He puts away the refuse bucket after washing it, and he sweeps out the refectory. Whoever notices that the pots of drinking water or washing water or water for the privy are low or empty sees to them. If any are too heavy for him, he beckons someone else by a sign of the hand and they move it by joining hands. We do not speak for that purpose. But every five days we sit out the night together in talk on the Dhamma. It is in this way that we dwell diligent, ardent and self-controlled.

In a society being wrecked by war, it is easy to understand how such simple austerity may have been attractive to many, not so dissimilar from our own time.

Nevertheless, the sangha was not universally popular; many people accused the Buddha of being against the Vedic norms of procreation,

marriage, and family. The rule of chastity was especially hard to bear for many, as witnessed by numerous offences and consequent rules for various sexual infractions recorded in the Vinaya. The Buddha's popularity with the political warlords of the time varied constantly, requiring the Buddha to move from place to place. At least two schisms broke out, the more serious one led by Devadatta, the brother of Buddha's wife, Yasodhara, and a cousin of the Buddha. The "schisming" and scheming became so intolerable that the Buddha withdrew into seclusion on more than one occasion, preferring to live alone in the jungle with a tusker elephant.

Devadatta

Devadatta was a Buddhist monk who was also a cousin and brother-in-law of the Buddha, as well as the brother of Ananda. He belonged to the Koliyan clan. According to the Pali tradition he left the Buddha's community with five hundred other monks to establish their own sangha. Most of these are said to have been Shakya clan relatives of both Devadatta and Siddattha. Devadatta became obsessed with his own worth. He came to believe that he and not Siddattha should lead the Sangha. Devadatta then requested the Buddha to step down and allow him to take over the Sangha. The Buddha replied that he did not even let his trusted disciples Sariputta or Moggallana run the sangha, let alone one like Devadatta, "who should be vomited like spittle." The Buddha made a public declaration against him. He warned the monks that Devadatta had changed for the worse. Devadatta responded by encouraging Prince Ajatasattu to kill his father, the good King Bimbisara, while Devadatta would murder the Buddha. Devadatta then tried to kill the Buddha himself by pushing a rock down a hill below which the Buddha was walking. As this also failed, he tried to get the elephant Nalagiri intoxicated and set him on the Buddha while the Buddha was on alms round. However, the power of the Buddha's loving-kindness (metta) overcame the elephant. Devadatta then tried to create a division within the order. He gathered a few monastic supporters and insisted that the Buddha agree to the following rules for the monks: they should live permanently in the forest, survive solely on alms obtained through begging, wear only robes made from discarded rags, live at the base of a tree, and abstain entirely from fish and meat. The Buddha permitted the

monastics to observe all this except the prohibition against eating fish and meat, leading Devadatta to criticize him for living in abundance and luxury, similar to the accusation made by the Group of Five before the Buddha's enlightenment. Devadatta decided to create a schism, reciting the training rules (patimokkha) separately from the Buddha and his followers, along with five hundred newly ordained monks. The Buddha sent his two chief disciples, Sariputta and Moggallana, to retrieve the misguided young monks. Devadatta mistakenly believed they had come to join his sangha and asked Sariputta to give a talk. While Devadatta slept, the chief disciples convinced the young monks to return to the Buddha.

The Last Years and Parinirvana

As the Buddha approached the age of 80, his health began to decline. He describes his complexion as no more clear and bright, and his body as flaccid, wrinkled, and bent forward, with changed senses. He complained of back aches. The Buddha's former personal attendant, Sunakkhatta, was going about attacking the Buddha's dharma as mere rationalism and deriding his spiritual attainments. To make matters worse, his old friend, King Pasenadi of Kosala, had died after visiting the Buddha. Pasenadi's son, Vidudabha, had used this visit as a pretext for staging a coup. Also, his own people, the Shakyans, were slaughtered by King Vidudabha of Kosala after Vidudabha learned that his mother was a Shakyan slave. This wiped out most of the Buddha's own people.

In his 80th year, the Buddha felt that his death was imminent. He set out the rules whereby the sangha should be governed following his death – to hold large and frequent meetings; to assemble and disperse in concord; to do their duty as members of the sangha in harmony; to keep the rules of the sangha without adding or subtracting anything, subject to the proviso that the minor and lesser rules may be abolished; to honour seniority; to avoid craving; to live in the forest; and to maintain mindfulness, each one for himself or herself.

The Buddha proclaimed a sermon, entitled "The Mirror of the Dharma," in which he declares that perfect confidence in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, combined with perfect virtue, guarantees immortality.

It was during the rainy season at a place called Beluvagamaka that a severe sickness came upon the Buddha with violent and deadly pains.

After recovering, he began to prepare Ananda for his inevitable death. During this time the Buddha's two foremost disciples, Sariputta and Moggallana, the arhants foremost in wisdom and psychic powers respectively, also died. Finally the Buddha came to the Capala Shrine in Vesali, where he informed Ananda of his expectation that he would die soon. For the next three months the Buddha continued to wander, visiting the sangha in various places and giving final dharma teachings. Finally he came to Pava, to the park of Cunna the goldsmith's son, who invited him to the Buddha's infamous last meal. This was a meal of sukara-maddava. Some say that this was a dish of fatty pork, translated by such phrases as "pig's delight" or "hog's mincemeat" (literally it may be translated as "soft" or "mild pig"). Others say it was a rice dish prepared with a special kind of mushroom, truffle, or bamboo shoots. Other's believe it was a medicinal drug, designed to cure the Buddha of his illness. Still others suggest that it was poison, perhaps an assassination attempt. No one has suggested the possibility that it was suicide, so far as I know, but in view of the Buddha"s prediction that he would die in three months, that he was already suffering, and that he told Ananda that he could live longer if he chose, this also seems to be possible. Some Tibetan lamas are reputed to be able to cause their death at will. Whatever it was, it disagreed violently with the Buddha, who directed that it be buried.

Departing from the meal, the Buddha collapsed and, overcome by thirst, drank polluted water from a stream nearby. Refreshed, the Buddha was able to make it to the River Kakuttha, in which he bathed and from which he again drank, and went to a mango grove. Here he lay down on a robe spread on the ground, on his right side. After some time he got up and continued on to the Mallians' sal tree grove on the turn into Kusinara, on the further bank of the Hirannavati River. Here he lay down on his right side between two sal trees. The Buddha gave Ananda advice about the disposition of his remains and places of pilgrimage. The texts portray the Buddha engaging in dharma talk right up to the end. Finally, he instructs the monastics to take the dharma and the discipline as their teacher in the Buddha's absence. The Buddha declared that after his death, the sangha should be based on seniority. He states that the sangha may abolish the lesser and minor rules of the Patimokkha. His last words were: "Indeed, bhikkhus, I declare this to you. It is in the nature of all formations to dissolve. Attain perfection through diligence." Then the Buddha fell into

a coma and passed. The texts say that the sal tree flowered prematurely. This suggests March, contrary to the unlikely tradition that puts the birth, enlightenment, and parinirvana of the Buddha all on the same day in May.

Dr. Mettanando Bhikkhu, a medical doctor, has argued at some length in his paper, "Did Buddha die of mesenteric infarction," that the account of the Pali texts is consistent with this diagnosis, a common disease of the elderly in which blood supply to the bowel is restricted.

The First Council

The First Buddhist Council was called together shortly after the Buddha's death by Mahakassapa, who was regarded as foremost in asceticism, despite the fact that Buddha said that the sangha should have no leader other than the dharma. Presumably, Mahakassapa also brought an ascetic orientation to the council and, as with all organizations, had both supporters and detractors. Indeed, it is clear from the Cullavagga that the council was sponsored by Mahakassapa's group, and that others were excluded.[50] The First Buddhist Council was held during the rainy season three months after the Buddha's death.

Since the rainy season retreat begins in June, it seems likely that the Buddha passed in March, which is consistent with the statement that the sal trees between which the Buddha passed bloomed prematurely. I have already discussed how the arhants at this council castigated Ananda for convincing the Buddha to ordain women and for failing to clarify which were the major and which were the minor rules of the Vinaya. Indeed, so deep was the misogyny of the arhants of this council that Ananda was castigated for allowing women to view the Buddha's body after his death, which (they claimed) was defiled by their tears.[51] Presumably, Ananda too had his supporters and detractors, so we see here how the politics of the First Buddhist Council may have played out. It is an open question whether all the monastics present at the First Council were men. Dr. Chatsumarn Kabilsingh argues that female monastics were also present.[52]

[50] See I.B. Horner, *The Book of Discipline,* Vol. 5, 395, n.1.

[51] Ibid, 400f.

[52] "The History of the Bhikkuni Sangha," If you are interested in learning more about the First Buddhist Council in the primary sources, you can read the 11th chapter of the Cullavagga in the Vinaya section of the Pali Canon here: https://archive.org/stream/p3sacredbooksofb20londuoft#page/392/mode/2up.

8
The Path of the Buddha

In his paper, "Arahants, Bodhisattvas and Buddhas," Bhikkhu Bodhi discusses the paths of the arhant and the bodhisattva in relation to the Buddha and the idea of Buddhahood. Bodhi is perhaps the greatest living Pali-English translator. One time Theravadin translator/scholar, he is now residing in Chinese Mahayana monasteries and has even been seen at teachings given by the Dalai Lama of Tibet. Here I intend to explore these paths in the context of the Pali Canon for, contrary to popular misconception, it is not true that the path of the bodhisattva does not appear in the Pali texts, or that the path of the arhant is not relevant to the path of the bodhisattva. If one examines the Canon as a whole, one will see that these two paths are intricately intertwined, as one might expect in an interconnected world. Once again we discover through close analysis that Hinayana and Mahayana are not mutually exclusive, but that the essential axioms that underlie both are implicit in the original Pali sources.

The Pali word 'arahant' is derived from Sanskrit arhant, "able." The word is used all through the Pali Canon to describe one who has achieved the goal of the path taught by Gotama, the Buddha. This goal posits the attainment of nirvana and the state of the Deathless, both in relation to the established karmic potentialities (sankharas) and in relation to the arising of future potentialities through the extinction of desirous attachment. Like the Buddha, the Tathagata, he who has stood erect and gone this way, the arhant is not reborn. The moment the karmic potentiality is "cut off" in him, he is liberated. This is an essential change of state from which there is no returning. The arhant is perfected and wise. He exists in a state of perfect clarity of mind. He has no intentionality or bias. Or, to put it a different way, his intentionality is perfectly

spontaneous, without attachment, like that of the Tibetan mahasiddha or the Taoist sage. He is utterly freed from all conditioning, all illusions, and all delusions.

When the Buddha awoke in northeast India about 445 BCE he despaired of being able to teach the dharma, the truth, to men, weighed down as they are by the dirt of attachment. A deva, Brahma Sahampati, inspired him to teach in order to save those who could be saved, the few whose coating of dust was least. The Buddha knew his realization was unique in this age, and yet rediscovered repeatedly in all ages as the ultimate realization of the nature of reality and emancipation itself. Therefore, his life represents the advent of a new Buddha eon, characterized by the spread of dharma civilization surrounded by the darkness of self-perpetuating suffering. The Buddhadharma is an ontological bubble.

Men pestered him with religious questions about the nature of the gods and the world, etc., but the Buddha declined to speculate and taught the direct method of emancipation, the method of detachment from desire that leads to arhantship. He knew that this liberates the power of truth that in turn leads to wisdom, but he intimated all the time that this teaching was a mere fraction of the totality of his wisdom and spiritual knowledge. In fact, the dharma is so vast it can barely be discerned in the age of men who rarely live to 120 years, compared to the lifespan and intelligence of the devas.

So great was the charisma of the Buddha that many men and women too, those who were karmically able, became arhants either immediately or shortly after hearing the Buddha speak, followed by a brief period of meditation of five to seven days. The Buddha taught that three things are necessary to become an arhant – understanding, discipline, and meditation, and that these things are also the way. He also taught many individualized methods adapted to the peculiar needs of each person, based on their karmic context at any given time. Understanding is, however, the essential first step, and he who perfects his understanding through the juxtaposition of faith and "questioning" (or investigation) becomes a "stream enterer" who will attain perfect emancipation within seven rebirths at most, depending on his or her karma. Karmic potentialities can also be destroyed by meditation, so that the advent of emancipation can be accelerated through practice.

The Buddha was an arhant, but an arhant is not a buddha. The essential difference between an arhant and a buddha is that an arhant follows the path taught by a buddha, but a buddha is the (re)discoverer of that path. The powers of an arhant pertain to impermanence, craving, suffering, seclusion, renunciation, mindfulness, striving, and spiritual power, whereas those of a buddha are far more numinous and abstract: possibilities and impossibilities, results of actions (i.e., karma), ways leading everywhere, the elements of the world, inclinations and dispositions of beings, emancipation and attainment, recalling past lives, the divine eye (karmic destinations), and the destruction of the taints (emancipation). The powers of a buddha are more "cosmic", ontically and karmically inclined, whereas those of an arhant are more psychological, ethical, and ascetic. The epithet "knower of the world" is one of a group of nine epithets used with reference to both arhants and the Buddha that is unique to the Buddha. One might say that the arhant is the master of dispassion, whereas the Buddha is the master of wisdom and power.

In particular, the Buddha did not learn the dharma from anybody else. Thus, he is self-ordained and self-realized, although it is clear from the story of Sumedha that a bodhisattva can arise in the time of a buddha and even be recognized by him.

The Buddha is also referred to in the Pali texts as a bodhisatta, Sanskrit bodhisattva, an "awakening being." The Buddha Dipankara, who lived thousands of ages ago, when he encounters Sumedha, predicted Gotama's future Buddhahood. According to the Chronicle of Buddhas (Buddhavamsa), Sumedha was a wealthy brahman 100,004 ages ago, an age (kappa, kalpa) being a vast period of time, perhaps billions or trillions of human years.

Sumedha lived in the city of Amaravati, and was a rich agriculturalist. He was also a brahman who recited and knew the Vedas perfectly and understood the science of mantra. Having an intimation of the truth of dukkha, suffering, he formulated the intention to seek nirvana by developing detachment. Sumedha reasons from the existence and impermanence of samsara that there must be a way leading to the transcendence of samsara, and he resolves to experience it: "There is, there must be that Way; it is impossible for it not to be. I shall seek that Way for the utter release from becoming."

Thus, having formulated the intention, Sumedha created the seed of realization that, in accordance with the law of karma, must culminate in enlightenment, for nothing can pass from the law of karma except through its fruition. Of course, the historical existence of Sumedha is not the point of the story.

Sumedha abandoned his wealth and went to the mountain called Dhammaka in the Himalayas, initially building a leaf hut for himself. After a while, he makes bark clothing and dwells under a tree, living on fallen fruits. This description clearly associates the Buddha with the yakshi tree spirit cult of ancient India, often associated with goddesses or other female deities. This association reappears when the Buddha abandons asceticism because a local girl, believing him to be a tree god who has benefitted her, offers him a dish of rice gruel.

Dipankara and Sumedha

Hearing that a buddha had arisen in the world, Sumedha travels with the throngs to where Dipankara is in order to generate merit for himself, chanting "Buddha, buddha." When he encounters Dipankara he falls down before him and lays his matted hair in the mud of the path, so that Dipankara is able to proceed without soiling his feet. Sumedha then mentally formulates his earnest wish to become a buddha, in the first formal formulation of the bodhisattva vow in the canonical Pali literature.

> While I was lying in the earth it was thus in my mind: If I so wished I could burn up my defilements today. What is the use while I remain unknown of realizing dhamma here? Having reached omniscience, I will cause the world together with the devas to cross over. By this act of merit of mine towards the supreme among men I will reach omniscience, I will cause many people to cross over. Cutting through the stream of samsara, shattering the three becomings, embarking in the ship of Dhamma, I will cause the world with its devas to cross over.

Sumedha's reference to being able to burn up his defilements, besides being a clear reference to the doctrine that karma potentials can be destroyed, alludes to the Buddhist view of merit based on acts of propitious karma. In the Buddhist view, the merit of moral acts accrues to the doer based on three principles: the quality of the intention, the quality of the action, and the quality of the object of the action. Thus, a good act

directed towards an evil object – say, an act of benevolence directed towards a thief – generates less "merit" – propitious karmic potential – than a good act directed towards a good object – e.g., a gift to a great man. So Sumedha realized then and there that the combination of the personal merit that he has acquired due to his practice to this point, combined with the extraordinary merit of an actual Buddha, would be sufficient to destroy all his defilements and propel him into Buddhahood itself. Nonetheless, even with this exceptional opportunity, it took Sumedha 100,004 ages to realize his intention.

Dipankhara, seeing him, declares, "Do you see this very severe ascetic, a matted hair ascetic? Innumerable eons from now he will be a buddha in the world. ... he will be named Gotama." The translator, I.B. Horner, adds, "His aspiration for Buddhahood was made therefore with the welfare of the world in view, beside which his own realization of Dhamma and his own crossing over faded into insignificance. Both had been accomplished without any instruction from a teacher."

Sumedha's act of merit culminates in the enlightenment of Gotama under the Bodhi tree.

The self-realization of the bodhisattva and the self-realization of an arhant are definitely distinct, according to canonical sources, from the very first expression of the Buddha speech (Buddhavacana) and remains a pervasive theme in all of the canonical sources right up until the parinirvana, as Bhikkhu Bodhi acknowledges in his paper, "Arahants, Bodhisattvas, and Buddhas." Yet there is no less doubt that the Buddha taught the short path of the arhant to his immediate disciples, whereby an individual may, through the hearing of dharma, cut off all attachment to rebirth, by interrupting the closed circuit of paticcasamuppada, which means "arising in dependence upon conditions." Despite a variety of rather tortured translations, we have two existing English words that capture the actual sense perfectly: "coproduction" and "codetermination." The essential meaning is that causes and effects are inextricably interconnected. The Buddha compared it to a hairball of incredibly tangled fibres, and told Ananda it is his most perplexing idea, which leads to the realization of emptiness (shunyata) itself. He then applied this insight to the appearances of birth, old age, suffering, and death, and showed the linkage of the causes and conditions as they develop out of ignorance, karmic potentialities, innate intelligence, mind/matter, the six

sensory fields, contact, feeling, craving, grasping, and becoming. The Buddha then realized that the karmic "arrow of time" has two directions, forward and reverse, and that all karmic constructs being inherently unstable and impermanent, are therefore liable to be converted into their opposite.

The Pali texts divide the pratityasamutpada into different numbers of links (nidanas), twelve being the most common, but the division into ten links highlights two points in the sequence that have special significance, being the beginning/end point and the midpoint respectively.

If we look at this linkage or chain, one can see that the will has little effect on karmic potentials, innate intelligence, mind, matter, the senses, feeling-contact, becoming, birth, ageing, and death – these are all "objective" processes that occur automatically or are "unconscious," as we say. You can't really "get at" any of them. However, between feeling-contact and grasping is desirous attachment, the primary attachment being the ego, atta or "self," which "reflects" as it were the deep nescience of the unconscious, the primary "not-knowing" that is the radical ontological ignorance that is at the root of karma and reality itself. Each of these is accessible to the mind, the one through the cultivation of "dispassion," also referred to as detachment, non-attachment, disinterest, non-grasping, etc., and the other – the deeper, more primary root of desire itself – through the cultivation of wisdom, knowledge, knowing, gnosis, which also appears as the first principle of the path. The path of detachment is the path of the arhant. The path of the Buddha, which is the path of the bodhisattva, is the path of wisdom.

Sometime after the "passing" or parinirvana of the Buddha, the issues of the wisdom of arhants became a sticking point in the sangha when a figure by the name of Mahadeva set forth his Five Points on the fallibility and imperfection of arhants. The majority accepted the view that the wisdom of the arhants was imperfect, causing the split in the sangha that ultimately led to the division of the Hinayana and the Mahayana. The followers of the first took the pursuit of the goal of the arhant as taught by the Buddha to be the only legitimate approach. The followers of the Mahayana, on the other hand, took the pursuit of the goal of the bodhisattva, as followed by the Buddha, to be the higher path. The only Hinayana sect to survive today is the Theravada.

Although some scholars doubt the historicity of Mahadeva, who may simply be a literary device, the Five Points of Mahadeva clearly exist. They address a question that must have been on the minds of some since the First Buddhist Council of Mahakassapa.

The path of the bodhisattva described in the Pali tradition is essentially identical with the Mahayana conception. The path of the bodhisattva begins with the resolution to achieve Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings, and proceeds through six perfections – giving, morality, patience, energy, meditation, wisdom. This is not so different from the Noble Path, which consists of higher virtue (= giving, morality, patience), higher wisdom (= wisdom), and higher mind (= energy, meditation). The Buddha actually says that the practice of these three things subsumes the entire Vinaya.[53] There is no suggestion in the Pali texts that Gotama was the last in the series – there is no Buddhist "seal of the prophets." Such an idea is incomprehensible in the light of Buddhist ontology. The Pali texts, therefore, refer to the next Buddha Metteyya, or Maitreya. There will be an indefinite number of Buddhas in the future as there were in the past. Therefore, there must be a path leading to Buddhahood and there must be those following this path, the bodhisattvas. Therefore, one cannot say that the path of arhantship is the only valid or efficacious path.

It appears that the Buddha taught the path of the arhant because in this age of degeneration the path of the bodhisattva is too hard. This is hinted at immediately following Gotama's enlightenment. However, there is no escaping karma. Therefore, the bodhisattva seed is karmically efficacious whenever or wherever it is planted, provided it is watered by the power of truth.

The Mahayana path of the bodhisattva differs from the Pali description in one particular, however. The Mahayana vow of a bodhisattva states that the bodhisattva vows to postpone enlightenment until all other beings are enlightened and samsara itself is rooted out. This view is essentially anti-ontological and impossible. In the Pali account Sumedha vows to achieve Buddhahood for the sake of all beings, and does so, thus passing out of samsaric existence. He neither destroys nor redeems the world, but his

[53] "No detailed regulations had yet been formulated at the time of the Buddha's death. What we call the Patimokkha, a set of more than two hundred rules governing monastic life, was in the earliest period a very simple formulation." Nakamura, *Gotama Buddha,* Vol. 2, 289, n. 93.

"dharma bubble" continues to expand until its energy is exhausted and ignorance and suffering again reign together alone.

After the enlightenment, on the way to Benares, near the Gaya River, before the Buddha had revealed himself to men, the ascetic Upaka came upon Gotama in the road. Upaka was an ascetic of the Ajivika sect, a popular spiritual philosophy of the time. The Ajivikas believed that the soul must pass through a predetermined series of states before it can achieve final liberation. Nothing can be done to change this necessity. In particular, established karmic potentials cannot be destroyed except by fruition. Thus, they were considered fatalists who denied the law of karma itself. However, they also believed that asceticism can ameliorate future unarisen effects. Upaka noticed the face of the Buddha, which was bright, clear, and serene – the Pali texts identify this as a by-product of meditation – and he asks the Buddha who his teacher is. The Buddha replies that he is self-ordained. This was, therefore, the first speech of the Buddha after his enlightenment. Upaka, however, was doubtful. Scratching his head, he muttered "Perhaps," and continued on his way, clearly unimpressed.

Note

> These two perspectives then define what the Buddha accomplished through his enlightenment. When we take the historical-realistic perspective, the Buddha became an arahant. However, though being an arahant, he was what we might call 'an arahant with differences'; he was, moreover not simply an arahant with a few incidental differences, but an arahant whose differences eventually elevated him to a distinct level, the Bhagava, a world teacher, one who towered above all the other arahants. These differences opened the door, so to speak, to the 'cosmic-metaphysical perspective' on the Buddha as a way to understand what accounted for these differences. Once this door was opened up, the Buddha was viewed as the one who brought to consummation the long bodhisattva career extending over countless eons, in which he sacrificed himself in various ways, many times, for the good of others: this is the cosmic aspect of that perspective. Again, he was viewed as the one who arrived at ultimate truth, the Tathagata who has come from Suchness (tatha + agata) and gone to Suchness (tatha + gata), and yet who abides nowhere: this is the metaphysical aspect of that perspective. This

> cosmic-metaphysical perspective then became characteristic of the Mahayana.[54]

Note that the bodhisattva ideal is not an innovation of the Mahayana; it emerged within the Hinayana itself, as the difference between the Buddha and the arhants and the fallibility of the latter became clearer over time. Moreover, sectarians who take the alternative view to its logical conclusion and who aver that there is no difference between the Buddha and an arhant end up affirming the path of the bodhisattva surreptitiously, as it were, for, if there is no difference, the Buddha becomes unnecessary, just one of many teachers – one can follow the path of the arhant directly, as it were, without depending on the Buddha, just as Siddattha Gotama himself did, which is exactly what the path of the bodhisattva is all about ultimately. Thus, the difference becomes merely a matter of semantics.

> The formula for the arahant reads thus: 'Here a monk is an arahant, one whose taints are destroyed, who has lived the spiritual life, done what had to be done, laid down the burden, reached his own goal, utterly destroyed the fetters of existence, one completely liberated through final knowledge.' Now all these epithets are true for the Buddha as well, but the Buddha is not described in this way; for these terms emphasize the attainment of one's own liberation, and the Buddha is extolled, not primarily as the one who has attained his own liberation, but as the one who opens the doors of liberation for others. That is, even in the archaic suttas of the Nikayas, an 'other-regarding' significance is already being subtly ascribed to the Buddha's status that is not ascribed to the arahant.[55]

[54] Bodhi, "Arahants, Bodhisattvas and Buddhas."
[55] Ibid.

9
The Coming Buddha

The present "Buddha-eon," age, or kalpa in the Buddhist historical reckoning has reputedly seen four Buddhas, beginning with Kakusandha, followed by Konagamana, Kassapa, and Gotama. Gotama was of course the historical Buddha who flourished about 440 BCE. According to one calculation, the duration of an age is equal to the time it takes for the longevity of human beings (not necessarily Homo sapiens) to devolve from 80,000 to 10 years and then evolve back to 80,000 years. This is called an antarrakappa, and its duration varies greatly in the literature. However, according to the oldest sutta in which this concept first appears, the Cakkavatti-Sihanada Sutta (DN 26), or Lion's Roar on the Turning of the Wheel, the lifespans are reported to devolve and evolve at the rate of roughly half of the previous lifespan per generation (see paras. 14–22).[56]

Since there will have been five Buddhas in this eon. In a later work, the non-canonical Nidanakatha commentary, this calculation is inflated to 1 year per century, perhaps to compete with the enormous Indian chronologies, which works out to millions of years.

Gotama will be succeeded by a Fifth Buddha, who is given the name Maitreya or, in Pali, Metteyya; Jampa in Tibetan. This name means "loving," "kind," "friendly," or "merciful," from metta, love, and mitra, friend. Currently he resides as a bodhisattva deva in the Tusita "contented"

[56] The actual intervals are 80,000, 40,000, 20,000, 10,000, 5,000, 2500, 1000, 500, 250, 100, and 10 years; during the final interval human civilization will be destroyed by a "sword interval" of one week; followed by 20, 40, 80, 160, 320, 640, 2,000, 4000, 8,000, 20,000, and 40,000, after the end of which Maitreya will appear, during the 80,000 year period. This rather arcane cycle implies that Maitreya will appear at least 75,270 years after the Buddha. The entire cycle is 234,620 years.

or "joyful" world, four planes above our own, where the lifespan is 1.6 million years (Sarvastivada tradition)

Bahá'u'lláh (1817–1892) is claimed to have been Maitreya. Others include:

- Xiang Haiming, who claimed the imperial title and identified himself with Maitreya in 613. So far, this is the oldest example I know of.
- Wu Zetian (624–705), the only female emperor in the history of China, and the founder of the Second Zhou dynasty. She had a penchant for cutting off the arms and legs of her opponents and putting them in jars.
- Budai (907–923), a Chinese monk of the Liang dynasty, who inspired the familiar Laughing Buddha statue that is often identified as an emanation of Maitreya.
- Gung Ye, a Korean warlord and king of the short-lived state of Taebong in the 10th century. His servants eventually murdered him.
- Lu Zhongyi, the 17th patriarch of the Yiguandao, a Chinese religion that emerged from the White Lotus movement of imperial China during the 1930s. His followers believe him to be the first leader of the era of the apocalypse. The sect has 900,000 followers in Taiwan and is spreading covertly in China.
- Peter Deunov (1864–1944), the founder of a school of Esoteric Christianity.
- Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895–1986) was proclaimed as Maitreya and the "World Teacher" by the Theosophical Society, and was raised as such from childhood but, to his credit, Krishnamurti renounced the Maitreya claim in 1929, at the age of 34 [sic], although he still allowed himself to be introduced as "the World Teacher" when he gave a speech at the United Nations in 1985.
- Ron Hubbard (1911–1986), the founder of Dianetics and Scientology.
- Samael Aun Weor (1917–1977), founder of the Universal Christian Gnostic Movement.
- Claude Vorilhon (b. 1946), a.k.a. Raël, the founder and leader of the UFO religion known as Raëlism.
- Some Muslim scholars, but not Mohammed himself as far as I know, have claimed that Mohammed fulfilled the prophecies concerning

Maitreya. Members of the Ahmadiyya Community, founded in 1889 in India by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad of Qadian, believe that their founder also fulfilled the prophecy of Maitreya.

- Another modern figure is Benjamin Crème, a follower of Alice Bailey, who claims to have received messages from Maitreya since 1975, and who publishes purported "Maitreya sightings." Crème, who also "channels" Maitreya, claims that Maitreya took bodily form in 1977, is bicorporeal, and (at least one of him) is living secretly in London, England.
- A Buddhist monk, Jonathan Condit, recognized Franklin Jones (1939–2008), a.k.a. Adi Da, as Maitreya in 1984. Although I haven't found any confirmation that Da himself made such a claim, the video in which Condit makes this statement is published on the Adidam website, so one might regard that as a confirmation.
- Scientology, Raëlism, and Adidam are documented cults.
- In the Tibetan tradition, there are numerous references to emanations of Maitreya. There are also Mahayana sutras purportedly inspired by Maitreya.[57]

The first Buddhist reference to Metteyya appears in the Cakkavatti-Sihanada Sutta, called the Lion's Roar on the Turning of the Wheel.[58] This is an unusual sutta in that, whereas most suttas record a question and answer session between the Buddha and a querent, whether a visitor or a

[57] Tibetan tradition ascribes the following works to Maitreya himself: The Ornament of Clear Realization, The Ornament of the Mahayana Sutras, The Ultimate Continuum of the Mahayana, The Distinction Between the Middle and Extremes, and The Distinction Between Phenomena and Their Nature. These works constitute part of a set of thirteen classic Indian texts that make up the core curriculum of sutra studies in many of the monastic colleges of Tibetan Buddhism. These are all in the course of being translated and published by Shambhala. These sutras are attributed to Asanga, the 4th century CE arhant, born in what is now Pakistan. Asanga, or Vijnanavada, as he is also known, founded the Yogachara school, along with his half-brother, Vasubandhu. According to his biographer, Paramartha, Asanga would travel in the mental body to the Tushita realm at night, where he received teachings directly from Maitreya. The next day he lectured on these teachings to his disciples.

[58] This sutta also contains important teachings on the one refuge, in which the Buddha equates dharma with self-knowledge or "mindfulness"; meditation on the body, feelings, mind, and mind-objects; overcoming the power of Mara through the accumulation of merit; the Road to Power, consisting of the concentration of intention, energy, consciousness, and investigation accompanied by an effort of will; and metta meditation.

monastic, this sutta is represented as an unsolicited monologue by the Buddha, while he was staying at Matula in the Magadhan territory.

This sutta describes the progressive devolution of the human race over time because of the disappearance of the Wheel Treasure, a clear metaphor for the dharma. Because of bad government, unwholesome qualities proliferate such as poverty, theft, violence, killing, lying, adultery, gossip, wrong views, and loss of respect for seniors, accompanied by a progressive decrease in human longevity, at the end of which time people will live like animals.

This will culminate in a time called the "sword interval," when human society will break down completely in a kind of apocalypse and human beings will murder each other, leaving only a small remnant of survivors. Interpreted literally, this will only take a week (interestingly, this only became technically possible since the invention of the atomic bomb in 1945). Because of the devastation, the survivors will decide to pursue wholesome ways, opposite to those that prevailed before, and with each subsequent generation, the life span will increase.

The sutta says, "in that time of the people with an 80,000 year life span, there will arise in the world a Blessed Lord, an Arahant fully enlightened Buddha named Metteyya, endowed with wisdom and conduct, a Well-Farer, Knower of the worlds, incomparable trainer of men to be tamed, Teacher of gods and humans, enlightened and blessed, just as I am now."[59] The text goes on to state that Metteyya's sangha will be ten times more extensive than the sangha of the Buddha. This is the only mention of Maitreya in the Pali Canon. Later traditions will describe him as a World Ruler. He is also associated with Shambhala, which will appear on earth in 2424 according to the Kalachakra.

A common statement that one reads in the popular literature is that a buddha appears at the nadir of human civilization, when he is most needed. However, although Gotama appeared when the human lifespan was about 120 years, Maitreya will appear when the human lifespan is about 80,000 years. Consequently, this statement is not supported by the suttas.[60] Of even greater interest is that this story encodes a precise period

[59] DN 26.25.

[60] Thus, each Buddha appears at the nadir of the descending arc of human civilization, and proclaims the dharma, which triggers an ascending arc, which expands, peaks, and reverses course into a new descending arc, and so forth. This also appears to be the view

that we can use to predict the advent of Metteyya, regardless of whether we interpret this mythos of human longevity literally or not. Interestingly, the seven-day interval at the reversal point, corresponding to the "sword interval," may also be translated as "age of science" (satthantarakappa). The suttas also state that the human lifespan at the time of the Buddha was 120 years. It is also clear that we are on the descending arc.[61]

Starting at 100 and working down to 10, then up again to 40,000 (bringing us to the lifespan of 80,000 years), and ignoring the relatively short seven-day interval, the antipode of the eighty thousand year lifespan, the total time interval implied is nearly 80,000 years. That is the oldest time that Maitreya could appear, and he could appear any time in the subsequent 80,000 years. Therefore, up to 160,000 years.

A similar scheme is found in the Nidanakatha, the introductory text to the Jatakas, except that the progression is from 10 to 84,000 years and back again and is equated with 1 year per century, corresponding to an antarrakappa or "intermediate cycle." This work represents the fully worked out chronological system of Pali Buddhism. Given a current lifespan of 120 years, this scheme works out to 8.4 million years. The 1 year per century formula appears to be an amplification, since if we work it out at a rate of one year per year, it works out to eighty or 84, 000 years. In any case, a period of about 80,000 years is implied. However, 80,000 and 84,000 appear to be metaphors for "an arbitrarily large number" (e.g., 84,000 teachings or "dharma doors," etc.,[62] and need not be interpreted literally, similar to the number forty in the Bible. Perhaps the best we can say therefore is that a period of thousands of years is implied.

According to the Surangama Sutra, a Mahayana sutra translated in the 8th century, the Buddhadharma will be forgotten after 5,000 years from the Parinirvana. Similarly, *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism* refers to

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of the Lotus Sutra. However, the picture that emerges in the Pali suttas differs somewhat. The ascending and descending arcs occur by themselves; the ascending arc is triggered rather by an interval of destruction; golden ages and pratyekabuddhas arise of themselves, without any reference to dharma; and a Buddha can appear at any point in this process, or even not appear at all. Yet those universes in which dharma never manifests still experience ascending and descending arcs as well as pratyekabuddhas.

[61] The Mahapadana Sutta (DN 14.1.7) gives a slightly different progression, from 80,000 years (Vipassi) to 20,000 years (Kassapa), at intervals of 10,000 years, followed by 100 years (Gotama), but it is not possible to calculate a time interval from this progression as the rate is not given.

[62] See Sang-jin Park, *Under the Microscope,* 62.

an early tradition that Maitreya will appear 4,500 years after the Buddha. Other traditions say 10,000 years. There is also a 10,000-year interpretation of the Kali Yuga. According to a tradition preserved in the Pali suttas, the Buddha said that the sangha would cease to be effective to produce arhants after 500 years (Peter Masefield), but he never connected this with the appearance of Maitreya as far as I know. No tradition puts the complete forgetting of the dharma sooner than 4,500 or 5,000 years in the future. Since this is a precondition for the appearance of a buddha, none of the current or historical claimants can assert their identity with Maitreya based on Buddhist criteria.

"In that time of the people with an 80,000 year life span, there will arise in the world a Blessed Lord, an Arahant fully enlightened Buddha named Metteyya, endowed with wisdom and conduct, a Well-Farer, Knower of the worlds, incomparable trainer of men to be tamed, Teacher of gods and humans, enlightened and blessed, just as I am now."[63] The An[a]gatavamsa also predicts that Metteyya (Skt. Maitreya) will appear before the end of the age (a vast but incalculable period). This sutta also refers to five disappearances: of attainment, conduct, learning, outward form, and finally the disappearance of the relics that constitutes the last stage referred to above. Corrupt government, secularism, climate change, environmental degradation (also predicted in the Book of Revelation), the decline of the sangha, and the gradual disappearance of dharma from the world will characterize this stage or age. Other sources put the coming of Maitreya between 4,500 and 5.67 billion years after the Buddha.[64]

The prophecy concerning the longevity of human beings when Maitreya appears is fascinating in view of current scientific efforts to extend human life. Far from being a pipe dream, biologists and other scientists who are currently working on life extension point out that it is only necessary for a human being to add a single year for each year of life lived in order for functional immortality to be achieved. Already we have sophisticated prostheses, artificial skin that can be "printed" on a dot matrix printer, and synthetic organs that have been produced on 3D printers. This technology is only going to advance in the future. Technologist and inventor Ray Kurzweil expects major breakthroughs in this regard beginning in the 2030s.

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[63] DN 26.25.

[64] *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism,* s.v. Maitreya, 517.

String theorist Michio Kaku, certainly one of the most intelligent people on the planet, has predicted that there are children alive today who will live to be a 1,000 years old. Kurzweil has suggested that functional human immortality may be achieved by 2045. However, in order for functional immortality to be achieved, genetic manipulation will be required that can turn the gene that kills us around 120 years of age off. Eventually, the human brain will have to be reverse engineered and replaced by a synthetic brain. President Obama has already announced funding for a plan to develop just such a brain, and a similar project is already underway in Europe. According to *Scientific American* (Nov. 2011), IBM's Blue Gene supercomputer has succeeded in simulating all of a cat's brain and hopes to have the hardware requirements to simulate a human brain by 2019. Is it possible that the latter will overlook some vital aspect of human neurobiology, resulting in the loss of the capacity for or perhaps interest in spiritual development? In this way, the dharma may actually be engineered out of existence, thus fulfilling the Buddhist prophecy that the dharma will be forgotten by all but a few.

A number of claimants, including the Bahá'ís, have based their claims on this 5,000-year cycle, but dated from the advent of the Kali Yuga on January 14, 3102 BCE rather than the Parinirvana of the Buddha in or about 400 BCE, even though the 3102 BCE date of the advent of the Kali Yuga is not intrinsically Buddhist and was not identified before 500 CE by the astronomer Aryabhatta, and therefore was not known to the Buddha. This is, of course, deliberate obfuscation. The Buddhist concept of the Buddha eon is far more ancient than the Kali Yuga. Even more esoteric is the Mayan Long Count Calendar of 3114 BCE. The Kali Era (KE) year 5000 corresponds to 1899. The Mayan Long Count Calendar year 5000 was 1887. The year 2500 of the Buddhist Era (BE) was 1956, based on the erroneous Theravada calculation. This period – 1887–1956 – was characterized by intense interest in spirituality at in the dawn of the original New Age movement that led in turn to the 1960s counterculture and the proliferation of Buddhism in the West.

The 5,000-year cycle is cited in the Brahma-vaivarta Purana in relation to the Kali Yuga. As is well known, the Mayan cycle is 5,125 years and ended in 2012.

The Surangama Sutra states that Five Disappearances will precede the end of the age of dharma: the disappearance of attainment of nirvana, the

method, learning, symbols, and relics. While one might argue that the attainment of nirvana has disappeared, the method, learning, symbols and relics are all at least partly known, remembered, and indeed experiencing something of a revival today. Therefore, these criteria have yet to be met. Even though one might argue that Buddhism is degenerate, it is certainly far from true that it has been forgotten.

In Buddhist Mahayana Texts. there is in fact a footnote in which F. Max Müller quotes the Mahasannipata-sutra as follows:

> After my Nirvana, in the first 500 years, all the Bhikshus and others will be strong in deliberation in my correct Law. ... In the next or second 500 years, they will be strong in meditation. In the next or third 500 years, they will be strong in "much learning," i.e. bahusruta, religious knowledge. In the next or fourth 500 years, they will be strong in founding monasteries, &c. In the last or fifth 500 years, they will be strong in fighting or reproving. The pure (lit. white) Law will then become invisible.

Müller adds, "The question therefore amounts to this, whether in that corrupt age the law of Buddha will still be understood? And the answer is that there will be always some excellent Bodhisattvas who, even in the age of corruption, can understand the preaching of the Law."

No one accepts the accuracy of the Theravadin Buddhist Era any more, the preferred date of the Parinirvana now lying between 420 and 380 BCE approximately or, in round numbers, 400 BCE. Thus, the last 500-year period referred to, during which the Buddhadharma is overtaken by corruption, sectarianism, and dissension, corresponds to the period from 1600 to 2100 CE and is about to be superseded by the disappearance of popular institutional Buddhism and the "appearance," if that is the word, of esoteric or "invisible" Buddhism.

If one looks at the matter syncretically, it seems that there is no doctrinal basis whatsoever for the claim that Maitreya is alive and well in the world today, while there is some scriptural basis for the view that the 21st century represents a decisive moment in the global transmission of dharma which may indeed come to be associated with an emanation in the appearance of one such as Padmasambhava, if not Maitreya himself.

CONCLUSIONS

Let us summarize what we have learned.

- Gotama is not the first Buddhist, and he will not be the last. He was a reformer, not an originator. Gotama is the fourth Buddha of five that will have appeared during the present historical epoch. The fifth Buddha is called Maitreya, which means "the Compassionate One."
- Human beings were originally very long-lived and are in the process of devolving, after which they will evolve again. Thus, every kalpa has ascending and descending arcs. Note that "human" does not necessarily imply Homo sapiens or even any terrestrial species of Homo, of which fifteen are known. Longevity is a characteristic of the devas and the original humans were devas inhabiting the realm of the radiant devas (abhassara), when they fell into progressively more material and sensual worlds. Finally, we are born into the bodies of animals, which paradoxically undergo a period of evolution as a result.
- Gotama was not a theist because he denied the reality of the personality and the personality of reality.
- There have been many dicey Maitreya claimants, culminating in the late 19th/early 20th century dawn of the New Age movement. Maitreya also inspired a number of Mahayana sutras.
- Human degeneration originates in the loss of dharma by the rulers of society, which subsequently fail to uphold the government in accordance with dharmic principles. This initiates a descent into animality. Human devolution will end in a catastrophe whereby civil society falls apart and a remnant reactively resolves to follow the path of wholesomeness, and reestablishes society on this basis. It appears from the sutta that this cycle repeats indefinitely. We know that Homo sapiens may have experienced this type of catastrophe before.
- Most traditions posit the appearance of Maitreya in the distant future, ranging from thousands to millions or more years. It appears that this number was inflated over time.
- Buddhas may also appear at the zenith of human evolution as well as at the nadir.
- There are traditions of a 5,000 and a 2,500-year cycle. The latter will culminate about 2100 CE.

- Longevity may also be created technologically, and Shambhala is explicitly described as being extremely advanced in terms of science and technology.
- Human science and technology might also cause the dharma to be forgotten, either because of changes to the brain or simple disinterest as people surrender to their samsaric lives overwhelmed by increasing sensory input.
- The dharma has not in fact disappeared, so the prophecy of Maitreya cannot be fulfilled now or at any time in the past.
- According to the 2,500 year cycle, we have been in the last 500-year cycle of dharma degeneration since 1600 CE.
- The next 500-year cycle of Buddhism, which will culminate in the appearance of Shambhala, is "invisible" or esoteric dharma. We are entering that stage now. However, there is no association with Maitreya, but a so-called "second" Buddha (like Padmasambhava or Seongcheol) might appear on the world stage, perhaps as early as 2045.
- One might speculate that Maitreya will be associated with Shambhala, which will manifest on earth in 2424, which elsewhere I have shown to be the start of the Age of Aquarius so-called, based on the accepted ayanamsa and the association of Aquarius, the sign of the eleventh house, with Friendliness and Compassion.

APPENDIX

Other dates concerning the coming of Maitreya

- 3,000 years (chatGPT)
- 5,000 years (chatGPT)
- 30,000 years (*Encyclopedia of Eastern Philosophy and Religion,* 217)
- 10 million years (Ultimate Extinction of the Dharma Sutra)
- tens of millions of years (Sutra of the Total Annihilation of the Dharma)
- 5.6 billion years (chatGPT, Tibetan)
- 5,670,000,000 years (Tamura, *Introduction to the Lotus Sutra,* 85)
- 5.67 billion years (*Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*)
- 5.706 billion years (Infinite Life Sutra)

10
Four Talks on the Path

The time has come to find a way of thinking about spirituality and ethics beyond religion altogether. HH the Dalai Lama

I

TAKING REFUGE

A Buddhist accepts the Three Jewels, by taking "refuge" (sarana) in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. The first word to think about here is this word "refuge." What does it mean? What is "taking refuge"? To take refuge is to seek the protection of good as a defense against evil. It can be a physical cave, or a city, or it can be a relationship with a person or authority. In all cases, there must be actual protection in order for a thing to be a refuge. Otherwise, it is simply a lie. So what does it mean then to take refuge in this sense in the Buddha? For one thing, the Buddha passed long ago, and made it clear he wasn't coming back. Remember, the protection must be actual. Two possibilities present themselves: either the Buddha continues to exist in some transcendent sense and is able to confer actual protection (cf. the Third Jewel), or the Buddha was referring to something else. Possibly, it is meant that we should study his example, as a spiritual hero who has attained realization. Studying his example may include seeking to understand him personally, or getting to know his mind, insofar as it can be known from the writings passed down to us. This can be taken very far. It is easy to see this in the worship of the charisma of a teacher. This can range from "spiritual

friendship" (the etymological and historical meaning of "lama") to regarding the teacher as the actual Buddha. One may also worship the Buddha nature in oneself, and identify oneself with the Buddha, including visualization during meditation. Buddha, as the quality of fully realized sentience in itself, is also the fundamental nature of reality and the self. All of this is implied in the First Jewel.

The Second Jewel is taking refuge in the Dharma. The Buddha also said that after his death the Dharma is to be regarded as the Buddha. Some scholars opine that the original formula consisted of taking refuge in the Dharma only. The Dharma is the teaching of the Buddha, but the Buddha made it clear that it is also primeval, the original and true spiritual way that is ultimately coterminous with the nature of reality itself (like Vedic rta). Taking refuge in the Dharma means that we redress the ignorance that is the ultimate cause of suffering, more fundamental even than desire, and we take refuge in the Dharma by eschewing lying, striving ever towards truth, not evading or avoiding truth, eschewing authorities, and discovering the truth for oneself primarily by the study of Dharma books and listening to Dharma teachers, and independent reading and reflection, but also by a personal commitment to view reality objectively, rationally, and scientifically and without attachment. All of this is implied in the Second Jewel.

The Third Jewel is taking refuge in the Sangha. The Sangha is formally the community of monks, but it is also the community of all beings, the community of all Buddhists, and the community of all superior beings, including the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Arahants, and perhaps some god-beings (devas) who have converted to Buddhism. We take refuge in each of these in different ways, primarily by following the precepts, but the ultimate refuge can only be taken in the community of Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and Arahants. All of this is implied in the Third Jewel.

From the foregoing, we conclude that the following represent the highest vibration of the Three Jewels:

> I take my refuge in the universal and innate Buddha sentience that is the fundamental reality of mind.
> I take my refuge in the power of truth of the primeval way.
> I take my refuge in the community of ultimately enlightened beings.

He who takes refuge is a refugee. A refugee is always in a state of flight, escaping from the evil that threatens him. The evil that threatens the Buddhist refugee is desirous attachment, the evil itself being karmic bondage and rebirth. Existence can never be actually redeemed. However deep one look into existence, one finds ever self-proliferating violence, chaos, conflict, and suffering. There is no world, the Buddha says, in which the preconditions of suffering are not fundamental, for what world is devoid of change? This flux or continuous change frustrates attachment and creates suffering. On the other hand, attachment creates these worlds for where there is perfect detachment, there is no desire for rebirth, and therefore rebirth itself ends, once all existing karma is expiated. In this way, existence is an illusion or a delusion. Existence is created by the mind, and can be destroyed by the mind. This is the answer to the question why we cannot create a perfect society of perfectly enlightened beings, and so redeem existence. If this were possible, it cannot be on the plane of change.

Still, human beings continue to labour and to build. The scriptures teach that we humans are in a unique situation to appreciate dharma, neither too distressed nor too blessed to be too involved in other, positive or negative actions respectively with no time or intention to develop the thirst for transcendence. However, human beings themselves have large groups that are either too poor or too rich to appreciate dharma, paralleling the greater condition of higher and lower beings.

When sangha and society are the same, such a society can be said to be relatively dharmic, i.e., as enlightened as possible within the human state. Shambhala is a city like this, and like Shambhala such a society will spontaneously produce many enlightened beings, as well as spiritual culture and a proliferation of the high arts and the best qualities in people generally. Creating such a society may be the next step in human evolution, as the present stage draws close to its conclusion. Ironically, Buddhism, with its long history of poverty, may become the true religion of technocracy, as prophesied in the Kalachakra.

Some people long for the end of samsara, whereas others who criticize Buddhism say that Buddhism is nihilism because once all beings are enlightened, existence will cease. However, where the scriptures refer to the end of samsara they are referring to the end of desirous attachment and rebirth, for samsara is beginningless and therefore must be endless as

well. Samsara is none other than the principle of temporal differentiation itself, the originating principle that is one polarity of the whole and therefore essential. Samsara is therefore beginingless in time and infinitely differentiated. Since the ultimate principle of differentiation is the karmic agency itself, there are an infinity of beings caught in an endless cycle of transmigration, illusory may be, but experienced for all that.

II

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

The only thing more fundamental to formal Buddhist belief than the Four Noble Truths is Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels. All Buddhists accept the Four Noble Truths. However, what do the Four Noble Truths mean? We can address this using the method of questioning.

The popular formulation of the Four Noble Truths goes something like:

1. Life is suffering.
2. Suffering is caused by desire.
3. The end of desire is the end of suffering.
4. The way to end desire is the Noble Eightfold Path.

I will restate them as follows in more exacting language, to clarify what we are really talking about:

1. The nature of rebirth is to suffer.
2. The root cause of suffering is the attachment of desire.
3. Through the extinction of the attachment of desire, suffering ceases.
4. The way to extinguish the attachment of desire is to follow the noble eightfold path in accordance with the middle way between all extremes. The eight steps are an elaboration of the perfections of the body (word, deed, and livelihood); heart (effort, mindfulness, and meditation); and mind (understanding and intention).

Much is made of the psychological implications of the Buddha's teachings, and his apparent reticence with respect to questions concerning metaphysics. Nevertheless, a metaphysical construct underlies and implies them, as they too are implicit in reality. Therefore the

question arises, What is the reality implied by the Four Noble Truths? Or what is their essential nature?

Rebirth is the fundamental characteristic of samsara, the differentiated phenomenology that human beings as sentient subjects experience in and through the body as "lived reality," governed by karma, the law of cause and effect on all levels – mental, verbal, and physical. It is rebirth, driven by karma, and characterized by suffering, that is the fundamental problem of the Buddha. The Buddha does not accept any mode of existence that implies change (or flux) as a solution to this problem, since desire posits stasis and all lived realities are impermanent and transitory by nature. This is the very definition of samsara. Therefore, the Buddha posits transcendence as an absolute goal that necessarily implies the cessation of lived reality. This may or may not imply the cessation of the ontological substrate itself, since there are indefinite numbers of suffering beings besides oneself. Salvation only applies to the individual who achieves the goal of absolute transcendence on his or her own. The salvation of one does not imply the salvation of all. Therefore, to end samsara itself one would have to contrive it so that everyone in a single human generation achieves transcendence together. Although possible in theory, given what we know now about the extent of the universe it does not seem even remotely plausible. Therefore, we take the view that samsara, understood metaphysically or ontologically, is eternal and infinitely differentiated, rather than finite and limited. There are other good arguments for this view as well, especially all of the same problems that are associated with theism, including theism itself. This in turn leads us further, to the ultimate view that samsara is actually the natural antipode of nirvana and that reality itself must be trans-dual. This view is called the "clear light." This leads to the realization that samsara and nirvana are one, and further to the realization that pain and suffering themselves are illusions, swallowed up in the natural perfection that must be the true ground. Nevertheless, the experience of suffering exists, even if only as the illusion of an omniscient and perfect Buddha nature. This is the trans-dual view.

The infinity of samsara implies an infinity of individually differentiated mind streams (santanas). This also corresponds to what we experience in the world. These mind streams are not attas (Sanskrit atmans) because their continuity is temporal, not spatial. They are the fundamental reality of samsara and their interaction creates perception that in turn creates

lived reality, characterized by desire, suffering, and ignorance. However, as we have shown desire and suffering to be illusions, so too is ignorance an illusion of the underlying Buddha nature that is the subtle essence of the mind streams themselves. The mind streams themselves are essentially information, i.e., karmic propensities or tendencies. Thus, lived reality itself is information. "Matter" is a delusion of the senses.

The Buddha never states that transcendence implies cessation in the ontological sense. In fact, he continuously implies that the individual who achieves transcendence is immortal. What is rejected is not even samsara, which, as I have shown, is ontologically essential and therefore indestructible, but illusory attachments that create the illusion of suffering, concealing the fundamental Buddha nature from its own realization. The cessation implied by nirvana is the cessation of an illusion resulting from the delusion that lived reality presents a complete and self-sufficient explanation of existence, especially the belief in the self that underlies the illusions of permanence, satisfactoriness, attachment, etc. The attachment to desire is therefore ultimately extinguished by the realization that there are no selves, no permanent things that can be possessed and held in stasis forever, and that therefore to desire these things in a fixed way or "with attachment" inherently causes pain. That this view has social and political implications is apparent.

Theoretically, one can enjoy existence from moment to moment, without attachment, as a buddha does, but such a solution is short-lived, for the price of the enjoyment of existence is the end of rebirth. If I were not attached then why would I create the karma of rebirth? It is a catch-22. This karma itself is created by desirous attachment. This is why vitalistic mysticism or mystical hedonism so-called (of the type associated with Aleister Crowley, for example; see J.F.C. Fuller, *The Star in the West*) is self-contradictory and often self-destructive. One can only enjoy the world when and to the extent that one renounces it. Only the real renunciate dare practise Tantra, the rarest jewel of all. "The world only gives herself up to those who do not desire her." Padmasambhava exemplifies this.

Since desirous attachment is caused, i.e., by ignorance, it is not essential and can be extinguished through karmic means on the levels of body, heart, and mind in accordance with the middle way between extremes. The middle way has two aspects. Horizontally, it is the energy of peace,

balance, and equilibrium. Vertically, it is the power of truth achieved by the pursuit of the trans-dual. The perfection of the body implies control of speech, action, and livelihood, both negative (i.e., self-restraint) and positive (i.e., good speech, good deeds, and good livelihood). This latter is for the bodhisattva, who seeks rebirth in the service of the future. The Arahant who seeks to transcend rebirth as soon as possible and for himself alone avoids good speech, action, and livelihood, in order to avoid creating karma that may lead to rebirth.

I have written elsewhere on the perfections of the body and how too literal understanding here is self-contradictory. The Buddha himself refers to these perfections as elementary and inferior, which is not to say that they are not necessary. The core perfections here are not killing, not stealing, no wrongful sex, no drunkenness, and not lying.

The perfection of the heart includes effort, mindfulness, and meditation. The perfection of effort implies enthusiasm. The perfection of mindfulness implies the realization of the essential emptiness of awareness. The perfection of meditation implies mental control.

Finally, the perfection of mind includes understanding and intention. Understanding implies the complete and perfect comprehension of dharma as the fundamental law of life. He who has right view knows through questioning that the dharma is true. He knows. Intention implies the will to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all beings, the ultimate altruistic aspiration.

The perfection of the body is the perfection of action.

The perfection of the heart is the perfection of energy.

The perfection of the mind is the perfection of reason.

III

THE NOBLE EIGHTFOLD PATH

The Noble Eightfold Path (ariyo atthangiko maggo) is the conventional English translation of the Fourth Noble Truth (ariyyasaccani) of the Buddha, which exposes the spiritual praxis by which the Third Noble Truth, i.e., the cessation of existential suffering (dukkha), articulated in the first three noble truths, is realized. The Noble Eightfold Path consists of eight “limbs” (anga) and is conventionally translated as:

1. Right View (samma ditthi)
2. Right Intention (samma sankappa)
3. Right Speech (samma vaca)
4. Right Action (samma kammanta)
5. Right Livelihood (samma ajiva)
6. Right Effort (samma vayama)
7. Right Mindfulness (samma sati)
8. Right Concentration (samma samadhi)

Later in His career, the Buddha reformulated the Noble Eightfold Path in terms of three primary attainments: Wisdom (panna), Morality (sila), and Meditation (samadhi). Dr. Peter Masefield has severely criticized the conventional translation of ariya as "noble," but in fact almost every word of the conventional English translation is inadequate and misleading, both intrinsically and in terms of their connotations in English. The conventional English translations are too general and too vague to express what the eight critical constituents of the Buddhist praxis are in fact. In particular, the translations do not express the sequential nature of the path, a point made emphatically by Dr. Masefield in his Ph.D. thesis and subsequent publication, *Divine Revelation in the Pali Canon*. Thus, the impression that is left on the English reader is that this is a set of injunctions, not unlike the injunctions of ethical and belief-based religions like Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, rather than a yoga. This vagueness has been taken up by religious Buddhists, both Western and Asian, so that the Noble Eightfold Path becomes little more than a belief system and an ethical system culminating in a vague notion of "meditation," which in popular thinking connotes little more than relaxation. Nothing could be further from the truth. Consequently, many Westerners practice "meditation" based on little more than an intellectual assent to a system of doctrines and the following of basic ethical rules as not killing, not stealing, chastity, not lying, and not drinking or taking drugs. As I have shown elsewhere, the Buddha Himself disparaged both religion (Brahmanism) and ordinary ethics, which He designated as "elementary matters of mere morality." This way of thinking is based on a misunderstanding of the word samma, which does not mean "right" or even "righteous," but rather connotes "completeness" and even

"perfection." Similarly, the word ariya does not primarily mean "noble," with its English racialist and classist connotations, but rather "high," "ideal," "pure," "perfect," and "sublime" – qualities that are attainable by all races and classes. Even these words do not properly connote the meaning of the word "ariyan," which refers specifically to the ancient Indian or Vedic way of the rishis that the Buddha sought to restore to its primordial purity. Thus, it also connotes "spiritual" as distinct from "religious" (in the bad or superficial sense, i.e., a system of mere observances), except that the connotation of the English word "spiritual" is too weak. "Exalted" is better.

The following translation is my attempt to find an English version of the Noble Eightfold Path based on these and additional considerations based on a profound re-examination of the literal and etymological meaning of the Pali, for which I have relied heavily on the *Pali-English Dictionary* of the Pali Text Society, rooted in the primary understanding of the path as a system of yoga based on a universalist understanding of spiritual aspiration and experience.

- The Fourth Sublime Fact
- The Sublime Eight-Part Method
- Gnosis (Wisdom)
- Perfect Understanding
- Perfect Intention
- Self-Discipline
- Perfect Speaking
- Perfect Acting
- Perfect Living
- Mental Concentration
- Perfect Striving
- Perfect Realization
- Perfect Transcendence

When one looks at the Sublime Eight-Part Method in this way, the structure of the way as a reflection of the anatomy of the person becomes self-evident. Thus, the first two parts correspond to the faculty of thinking; the following three parts correspond to speaking and action, thus completing the triad of thought, word, and deed. The concluding,

supermundane parts correspond to will, consciousness, and transcendent or trans-dual consciousness respectively. Students of anatta (the doctrine of "no-self") may also be disconcerted to discover that sati also means "self-possession," "self-consciousness," i.e., the sentience of sentience in itself, as distinct from the sentience of phenomena.

The most disconcerting element of this exegesis, which also forms a critical aspect of Dr. Masefield's analysis, is that the first part of this method does not refer merely to intellectual or philosophical belief, but rather to the perfection of the salvific knowledge of dharma – a detail that is almost entirely neglected in the West, and thus (according to this interpretation) vitiating or at best diminishing the nearly exclusive Western emphasis on meditation. The anti-intellectual prejudice is so ingrained in certain circles of Western Buddhism that anyone who actually thinks about the teachings is disparaged as a mere rationalist. Ironically, the Buddha himself was accused of the same. Some Buddhist groups regard questioners as potential trouble-makers. This merely mirrors the modern Western prejudice against philosophical speculation and the widespread ignorance that characterizes North American society in particular. On the other hand, certain religionists would also have it that ethics or morality constitute the basis of the method, followed by meditation, with wisdom as a distant culmination of the path. This interpretation is precisely opposite to the exposition of the Buddha Himself.

IV

THE ARROWS OF THE PATH

Soon after one begins to study religion phenomenologically as the exploration of actual experiences, one discovers that experiential spirituality includes both active and passive methods. The passive approach studies those experiences that occur to others and indirectly through whatever monuments they bequeath to us, their successors. This is the orthodox approach that has become the religious establishment of the new world order, the organization of the great religious monuments of humankind. Their names are familiar to us: the Bible and the Qur'an are the two great Western examples. In Asia, the Vedas, the Pali Canon,

and the Tibetan and Chinese canons, including the Taoist canon, also fall into this category, along with many others in both the West and Asia. These traditions have been codified through long discussion over centuries, and are all deeply influenced by the feudal period of history. For most of them, feudalism came later than the period of their inception and is now in its senescence, especially the belief in authority, the tendency to fundamentalism, and a hive-like hierarchical collectivist totalitarianism that would not be tolerated in ordinary society today. A notable exception to the foregoing statement is Islam.

The active approach to the phenomenological exploration of spiritual experience entails the deliberate induction of experiences that may be described as "spiritual," "religious," or "mystical." Experiences of this type are not merely experienced; they are also sought and have been for tens of thousands of years. It is certainly true that the religious monuments referred to above are amongst the greatest works of human genius and true wonders of the world, if by "greatness" we mean beauty, sublimity, profundity, humanity, depth, splendour, grandeur, and ultimate righteousness, as well as the capacity to induce these qualities in others. The traditions associated with these icons receive the utmost veneration of billions of humans, and have since very early in their inception. All tend to various degrees of mutual animosity and hostility.

Orthodoxy, as noted above, tends to preserve traditional modes of thought and moral and ethical systems that affect the societies with which they co-exist. However, the growing power of science, technology, and industry has led to a new world order, a secular society that tolerates tradition because of its stability but is fundamentally hostile to it.

Both orthodoxy and the new world order are inherently interested in their own beliefs, values and systems of organization and all therefore are collectivist and conformist in principle. Active experiential spirituality, on the other hand, is inherently individual, experimental, challenging, and even dysfunctional (a common characteristic of all creative states). Thus, orthodoxy and the new world order both dislike it. Yet the authentic phenomenological exploration of experience leads inevitably to it, for no one can truly understand what one has not experienced and the direct experience of being demands the daring to demand a personal and direct relationship with it. Without this direct and personal relationship to being, there is no authenticity and no truth. In the words of Heidegger,

science does not think. This judgment stands inscribed above all of the portals of academe today, which collaborates with the new world order in the service of tradition, whilst bantering or bickering over footnotes.

All of the foregoing is crystallized around the whole social hysteria and authoritarian collectivist conformism surrounding the legal status of LSD and other psychedelics, the ultimate Arrows of the Path. It is only when we imagine a world that is truly free that we realize just how truly unfree we are, as we enter the era of scientific totalitarianism foretold by Huxley. Huxley also supported the hypothesis, subsequently developed by Terence McKenna, of the origin of the rapid evolution of the human neocortex in the ingestion of hallucinogenic mushrooms by early primates. Any discussion of active spiritual phenomenology therefore carries with it an aura of danger and risk.

When one studies spiritual and religious experience in this way one begins to recognize the recurrence of methods and techniques that parallel Jung's doctrine of the archetypes, which, either alone or in combination with psychedelics, have the capacity to induce authentic and transformative personal spiritual and religious crises in suitably prepared individuals in appropriate and supportive settings. These methods and techniques are complex, incorporating many different elements, conditioned by psychology, symbology, metaphysics, historical tradition, time, culture, place, etc. However, when one analyzes these one does not find increasing complexity. Instead, one discovers a finite set of active methods and techniques that in turn correspond to the methods and techniques used by archaic peoples whose origins in prehistory presumably reflect universal dynamics that underlie the historical traditions that survive today. These methods and techniques appear to operate in conjunction with inherent characteristics of human psychology to induce altered states of consciousness, including alterations in physical sensing, emoting, thinking, and changes in energy and behaviour. Although difficult and dysfunctional changes do occur, the overwhelming preponderance of judgment of those who have had these experiences, including highly educated and trained observers, is that they are positive, blissful, truthful, energizing and ennobling experiences, and that they lead to real, long-lasting and beneficial psychological changes and social behaviours. Similarly, Mircea Eliade found that the shamans were the psychologically healthiest and most integrated members of society. The

religious monuments of tradition originate and produce experiences of just this type, much of their art, literature and oral traditions originating in just this type of experience. The scientific totalitarianism of the new world order, however, places a negative construction upon these experiences as well as tradition itself, the influence of which is being progressively eroded by the influence of the former, including judgments that these experiences are bizarre, dysfunctional, delusional, disorienting, false and individually and socially dangerous aberrations. Communism is the logical resultant of radical secularism in which religion is actively persecuted and criminalized. Today we see the convergence of communism and capitalism as capitalism itself becomes increasingly scientistic, materialistic, totalitarian, and authoritarian. Under the current dominant system of scientific totalitarianism and global corporatism, spiritual experience is mercantalized, medicalized, and suppressed with drug treatments if necessary to induce a return to consensual conformity. It is barely tolerated in the form of the creative fringe.

11

Near Earth Realms, Fallen Angels, Human Beings in Buddhist Cosmology

Buddhist cosmology is nowhere explained in the Buddhist sutras in its totality as a system. Yet its essential architecture appears in all schools, both Hinayana and Mahayana, with only minor differences, based on a systematic analysis and synthesis of scattered references found throughout the Pali Canon. Thus, it must have been a topic of intense scrutiny, having arisen during the pre-sectarian period that is closest to the original teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha. Consequently, this discussion cannot be assigned to any particular sect. It underlies and unifies the whole Buddhist worldview, even the Theravada, which commonly claims that the Buddha did not present an ontology. Here I will present a synthetic overview of Buddhist cosmology and ontology in the context of contemporary post-Newtonian science and explore its implications for the spiritual path. One is struck by the degree to which the Buddhist worldview anticipates contemporary scientific discoveries, once one overcomes the misosophy of "scientism" and "philosophical materialism," which true science transcended long ago. That this is not generally recognized or accepted testifies to the ignorance that masquerades as enlightenment today. Nor is ontology irrelevant to the topic of spiritual development, as some might assert, based on a selective reading of the texts. Rather, in the light of the Buddhist revelations concerning the fundamental and ultimate nature of reality, Buddhist

beliefs concerning spiritual practice acquire a clarity that only enhances the prevalent psychological interpretation, which also suffers from the accusation of subjectivity. Unfortunately, what Evans-Wentz referred to as the "long dark age of the West" still blinds us to the insights that might be derived from realizing that scientism, as distinct from science, does not only not present a comprehensive picture of reality; it actually blinds us to it, in the service of a contemporary ethos that increasingly threatens to destroy the world of nature and humanity in the relentless pursuit of competition, property, and mindless consumption that stands opposed to the three primary facts of existence: non-self-identity, impermanence, and suffering as taught by the Buddha.

Buddhist cosmology divides experience both vertically and horizontally. Horizontally, the Buddhist sutras describe worlds or world systems separated by vast regions of empty space. These worlds appeared in great spheres that emerged out of a state of potentiality, expanded, contracted, and disappeared over long periods ranging from millions to trillions of years. In the largest sense, this fourfold process of origination, evolution, devolution, and potentiality have no beginning and no end – they are infinite and eternal in extent and duration. The spherical universe is itself organized into (more or less) spherical stars and galaxies that themselves move in (more or less) spherical orbits, and even larger collections of galaxies. The latter fact that has only been recently substantiated by science. The Buddha also describes the destruction of solar systems by supernovas, which proceed in seven stages or phases (the so-called "seven suns"), characterized by the cessation of rain and the consequent disappearance of vegetation over a period of hundreds of thousands of years, followed by the drying up of the rivers and oceans and finally the incineration of the earth itself. String theorists also posit that universes themselves coexist as holographic diffraction patterns in a two-dimensional plane that appear in our universe as black holes. While not specifically indicated by Buddhist cosmology, such a view is certainly consistent with it.

This quaternary dynamic structure of origination, evolution, devolution, and potentiality also describes the very small. In fact, it is the fundamental process structure of becoming itself (samsara). Phenomenal reality is nothing other than process, cycles occurring within cycles within cycles, driven by the law of karma (causality). What we call "matter" is not

a "stuff," but rather a particular kind of process or system of processes. This description largely accords with the modern scientific conception of the physical nature of reality since the downfall of philosophical materialism. The mathematician Alfred North Whitehead in his book, *Process and Reality,* describes it, for example. Similarly, Buckminster Fuller believed that the world is geometry.

The Buddha also describes a vertical dimension, ranging from a high-energy, abstract polarity to a low-energy, "material" polarity that also accords very well with the worldview of modern physics. Buddhist cosmology divides this vertical continuum in various ways, starting with a twofold division into formless and form "realms" (lokas or dhatus) and ending with a division into thirty-one fundamental planes of "vibration" or existence.

According to Buddhist cosmology, human beings inhabit the fifth realm, counting from the bottom, or the twenty-seventh realm, counting from the top, of these thirty-one planes of existence. The human realm is also the lowest (seventh) realm of the so-called "happy destinations," represented as a flattened inverted triangular island-continent that floats in the ocean to the south of Mount Sumeru, the shape of which suggests the Indian subcontinent. This represents the earthly realm (manusyaloka) consisting of four continents.[65] Sumeru (lit. "excellent" or "wondrous mountain") is the Buddhist representation of the universal archetype of a central world axis, usually represented as a mountain, tree, or pole. Commonly identified with Mount Kailash or Kangrinpoque in the Tibetan

[65] These are Jambudvipa ("land of the Indian blackberry tree"), Purvavideha ("land of the thorn tree"), Aparagodiyana ("land of the kadam tree"), and Uttarakuru ("land of the kalpa tree"), located in the south, east, west, and north respectively. In Buddhist cosmology, Uttarakuru is considered to be a place where the inhabitants enjoy a blissful existence. The people of Uttarakuru are said to live extraordinarily long lives, have no need for agriculture, and are free from the sufferings of sickness and old age. The concept of Uttarakuru is often used to illustrate the ideal conditions that can be achieved through virtuous living. Uttarakuru is described as a land where resources are plentiful, and the inhabitants do not need to work for their sustenance. Trees bear fruit perpetually, and there is no need for farming or manual labor. The people of Uttarakuru are said to live in harmony, without conflict or strife. They are often depicted as virtuous and moral beings, living in an almost utopian society. The inhabitants enjoy long lives, free from illness, old age, and the typical sufferings that plague humanity in other regions. Our own species of human lives on Jambudvipa, characterized by the shortest lifespan of the four types.

Himalayas, this identification is clearly symbolic. In fact, geographically, and here I am primarily interested in physical facts, Sumeru clearly represents the rotational and magnetic axes of the earth. The four continents represent the continents of the earth. The shape of the southern continent, where human beings live, clearly corresponds to the Indian subcontinent. Thus, the western continent would correspond to the African-South American landmass, which we now know were originally joined; the northern continent to North America and Greenland; and the eastern continent to Eurasia. It is now known that several supercontinents have formed and separated throughout the earth's history. The Buddhist description appears to allude to a specific moment in the earth's geologic history when the continents had just this formation. According to at least one animation I have seen, this was the situation about 120 million years ago. In this interpretation, then, the "peak" of Mount Sumeru would correspond to the North Polar Axis of the earth, the magnetic pole of which, like Shambhala, "wanders." The ocean around its base corresponds to the "one world ocean" in which the continents drift. The "one world ocean" is clearly shown in the Dymaxion map invented by R. Buckminster Fuller.

Mount Sumeru includes the realm of the asuras, who inhabit its base; the realm of the Four Great Kings, who occupy its four slopes;[66] and the realm of the Thirty-Three gods, Vedic and post-Vedic demigods who occupy its truncated apex. Thus, Mount Sumeru is represented as a truncated four-sided pyramid. This architecture resembles that of Mount Kailash as well as the ziggurats, built in the ancient Mesopotamian valley and western Iranian plateau, and similar structures, called step pyramids, also found in Egypt, Europe, Mesoamerica, South America, North America, and Indonesia. Floating in the air above Mount Sumeru are the realms of time (the yama devas), joy or contentment (the tusita devas), two realms associated with creativity, and three God-realms (the Brahma devas). Below the realm of the humans and the asuras are the realms of

[66] These are Vaisravana, "he who hears everything"; Virudhaka, "he who causes to grow"; Dhrtarastra, "he who upholds the realm"; and Virupaksa, "he who sees all," associated with the colours yellow, blue, white, and red; the north, south, east, west; and various symbols, including the umbrella, mongoose, stupa, sword. pipa (lute), serpent, stupa, and pearl. The function of the Four Great Kings is to report to Sakra, the chief of the realm of the thirty-three gods, on the moral state of humanity.

ghosts, animals, and hell-beings, the latter divided into eight hot and eight cold hells.

It is fashionable to interpret the realms of Buddhist cosmology psychologically, as representative of various types, stages, or degrees of consciousness or conscious realization. This point of view is certainly valid, but this does not mean that the thirty-one planes of existence are merely psychological symbols in the modern sense. According to the Buddhist worldview, psychological and ontological states are opposite sides of the same coin. Reality itself is ultimately resolvable into mental states, matter itself being merely a delusion of consciousness. In this discussion, I intend to focus on the neglected ontological aspect of the Buddhist cosmic conception. In particular, I will focus on the realms that we perceive and/or that interact or communicate with our own, "earthly" realm. I am well aware that this description finds correspondences with certain modern speculative theories associated with various Theosophical, National Socialist, UFO, and conspiracy theories. Dr. Jacques Vallée is one of the most reasonable individuals currently exploring this area.[67] However, while these correspondences may be interesting, it is not my intention here to argue for or against these theories or to endorse any particular point of view, but simply to present the primordial Buddhist cosmology from an historical and scientific perspective.

According to the sutras, all of the thirty-one planes of existence, corresponding as they do to "levels" of conscious realization, are inhabited by sentient beings. This must be true because, as in quantum physics, it is the act of observation that gives rise to phenomenal reality. This is also true of the horizontal dimension of samsara. The difference is that the sentient beings that inhabit the realms above the human realm are far more intelligent, knowledgeable, beautiful, powerful, faster, and long-

[67] Dr. J. Allen Hynek (1910–1986), noted astronomer and professor, was one of the most respected figures in the scientific study of the UFO phenomenon. Prophetically, in 1980 he declared at the Proceedings of the First International UFO Congress, "I hold it entirely possible that a technology exists, which encompasses both the physical and the psychic, the material and the mental. There are stars that are millions of years older than the sun. There may be a civilization that is millions of years more advanced than man's. We have gone from Kitty Hawk to the moon in some seventy years, but it's possible that a million-year-old civilization may know something that we don't … I hypothesize an 'M&M' technology encompassing the mental and material realms. The psychic realms, so mysterious to us today, may be an ordinary part of an advanced technology."

lived than we are, by many orders of magnitude. They are not, however, necessarily more spiritual than humans. Many are decisively less spiritual. Because of their great gifts, inherited from past karma, many of these beings are relatively complacent, and simply enjoy their lives, which can last millions, billions, or even trillions of human years. However, at the lower end of the scale, the inhabitants of the Brahma worlds (mahabrahmas) may and do take an interest in human affairs. These beings occupy the highest realm that actually interacts with humans. The Brahma world is the lowest world in the system of thirty-one planes that is not subject to periodic destruction, whereas all of the planes below the Brahma realm are subject to the fourfold process of origination, evolution, devolution, and potentiality already discussed. Beings within these realms are, however, still subject to this process. Otherwise, their merit would not be exhausted and they would not be reborn. Thus, the Brahma world is the highest and subtlest plane of phenomenal existence. They live approximately one trillion years. The best-known inhabitant of this world is Mahabrahma Himself, a.k.a. "God," who erroneously believes Himself to be the Creator of the Universe, because He is the first being to be reborn after the destruction and reappearance of the universe. Clearly, this contradicts the alternative view that the Brahma world is not destroyed. I need to research this apparent contradiction more thoroughly, since it seems that both views cannot be true. In Gnosticism, He is called the Demiurge (demiourgos, "creator"). The Mahabrahma Sahampati convinced the Buddha to preach following his Enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Thus, although ignorant and deluded in some ways, mahabrahmas are not actually malicious. The Buddha encouraged his disciples to be reborn there, as an intermediate step towards enlightenment, and provided the well-known metta meditation to achieve this goal.

The so-called "divine race" (devaputra) inhabit the next lower world associated with creativity (parnimirmita-masavartin). These are the original capitalists, divine beings (devas) who delight in desire and enjoy the offerings of others. These correspond to the anthropomorphic gods of the pagan polytheistic pantheons, which in many traditions (e.g., Vodun) are literally satiated by the offerings they receive. These beings live for about nine billion human years. Mara, the tempter of the Buddha, is often

said to reside in this realm, although he is also associated with the demonic asuras. I will be speaking more about this later.

Next are the bodhisattvas, who are reborn in the human world as Buddhas. Each Buddha initiates an eon, era, epoch, or dispensation of dharma, which does not end until his dharma is forgotten. Thus, we are now in the Buddha-dispensation (sasana) of Shakyamuni Gautama, which will last for only about 5,000 years. We are, therefore, now at the midpoint of the Shakyamuni-dispensation. The bodhisattvas inhabit the Tusita ("contented") realm, the second realm above the human. These beings live for 1.6 million years.

The realm of the Four Great Kings is the closest realm next above our own. The nature spirits, dwarfs, fairies, dragons, goblins, trolls, and similar beings of all traditions, of varying degrees of ethical purity, inhabit it. These beings live for 25,000 years).

Finally, we find the asuras and four human types. The latter range in longevity from 10 to a thousand years. Our own human species, which is merely one of many, lives to the south of the base of Mount Sumeru. Currently we live about 120 years, although originally we were much longer-lived than this. During the age of the chakravartins (lit. "rulers of the universe") human beings of the different continents were able to travel between the continents, using a flying machine called a cakraratna.

Whereas human beings inhabit four great continents in the one world ocean that surrounds the base of Mount Sumeru, the asuras inhabit the ocean itself immediately surrounding the base. The word "a-sura" was interpreted to mean "non-sura," i.e., not a sura, a synonym for deva (literally, a "shining being" or energy being of light). Deva can also be translated "celestial dweller" or "star."

Asura is often translated Titan, demigod, anti-god, or demon. The asuras are described as addicted to the passions of wrath, pride, envy, insincerity, falseness, boasting, and bellicosity. They are dominated by ego, force, and violence. At least some asuras are actually malevolent. As with all of the six classes of sentient beings, asuras may be reborn as human beings, and human beings may be reborn as asuras. Because humans and asuras occupy essentially the same plane, i.e., the one world ocean surrounding the base of Mount Sumeru, there is considerable interaction between them. Asuras enjoy a much more pleasurable life than humans do, but they are plagued by envy for the devas.

Asuras and human beings are alike in that we both have shared a similar fate. Both human beings and the asuras originally occupied a much higher realm in the Buddhist hierarchy. Asuras originally lived in the realm of the Thirty-Three Gods on the peak of Mount Sumeru, but they were cast down to the foot of the mountain due to their drunkenness. Thus the asuras and the devas of the Thirty-Three Gods engage in constant conflict, in which human beings also become embroiled.

The asuras were not always regarded as evil beings. In the Rig Veda (1500–1000 BCE), asuras were a type of deva, such as Asura Varuna, the god of the celestial ocean, the underwater world, and law and order, moral and societal affairs, and nature. Asuras (lit. "lords") were originally a term associated with individual devas, not a class of beings in their own right. Asuras become a distinct class of being during the late Vedic period (1000 BCE–500 BCE). Originally the asuras were the older and stronger siblings of the devas, powerful and beneficent. The later Vedic texts begin to document a conflict between the asuras and the devas, in which the asuras were invariably victorious. According to the Bhagavad Gita, the asuras are described as vicious, proud, arrogant, conceited, angry, harsh, and ignorant. This reflects a growing conflict between the older, dominant cult of asura worship and a newer but rising cult of deva worship. Originally, the asuras were non-anthropomorphic and formless gods, in contradistinction to the more anthropomorphic devas. The asuras were the guardians of the natural and moral laws of rita, the great principle of cosmic order that regulates and coordinates the operation of the universe, comparable to dharma and karma. The deva worshippers, on the other hand, were concerned with power, might, fear, submission, and the status quo. Interestingly, it was also during the late Vedic period that women were stripped of their traditional rights and privileges and demoted to the status of property, something the Buddha opposed but which was reinstated immediately after his death (parinirvana) about 400 BCE by the arhants of the First Buddhist Council. Thus, the division between the asura and deva worshippers appears to correspond to a social schism that occurred during the late Vedic period and culminated in the samana counterculture of the 6th and 5th centuries BCE. In Buddhism, the asuras are seen as inferior deities who are never satisfied and who always strive to improve themselves. This is paradoxical, because the Buddha opposed the Brahmanic establishment based on caste, supported by the deva

worshippers, as a degenerate remnant of the primordial tradition that the Buddha sought to restore. This schism reflects a conflict between the adherents of the old gods that continues today, in which the worshippers of the old gods seek to restore their worship to a position of primacy, against the more recent gods of oppression. One finds a similar conflict in Egyptian mythology, in which the old gods, like Set, now associated with evil, were originally not regarded as evil at all. This principle of cosmic conflict became entrenched in later religions, such as Zoroastrianism and Christianity, as well. In the Iranian tradition, the asuras, especially Asura (Ahura) Mazda, the personification of Wisdom, retained their privileged status and it was the devas who were demonized and cast down.

Similarly, human beings originally occupied the radiant or splendid realm (abhasvara), next above the Brahma world. Here we dwelled as beings of light or pure energy, characterized by delight and joy, with lifespans of approximately 10 trillion years. The original transhumans or deva-humans were psychologically individual but physically alike. Plato describes them as celestial bisexual spheres of pure energy. When a universe re-emerges from a state of potentiality (the so-called vivartakalpa), it is immediately populated by humans from the Abhasvara realm. According to modern scientific reckoning, this occurred about 14 billion years ago. The first humans were not like modern humans. They shone in their own light, moved through the air without mechanical aid, lived for a very long time, and did not require physical nourishment. They were more like a type of inferior deity than contemporary human beings. This was the age of the chakravartins (lit. "universal rulers"). However, gradually we developed a taste for physical food and sensation. Our bodies became heavier and more material. We lost our intrinsic luminosity. Our bodies became more differentiated. Our lifespan decreased. We divided into two genders and began to reproduce sexually. We began to hunt and eat the flesh of animals. Territoriality, property, greed, theft, violence, and criminality gradually overtook us. Social distinctions and government arose. The critical transition to humanity appears to have begun during the hunter-gatherer stage of human civilization. This arose about 2 million years ago according to the archaeological record, corresponding to Homo erectus, who is also credited with the discovery of fire. It culminates in the Neolithic Revolution, which occurred about 10,000 years ago. This appears to be the period when the deva-humans began to enter into the physical

primate evolution through the process of rebirth or transmigration. This was perhaps facilitated by the ingestion of psychedelic plants by early primates, as suggested by Aldous Huxley, Terrence McKenna, Graham Hancock, and others, thus opening a "door" to the higher realms.

Asuras perceive devas in the same way that animals perceive humans. Humans perceive animals consistently, unless they are very small, but devas and asuras only rarely. Asuras are often confused with hell beings. The objection to devas that we do not see them disappears entirely when one realizes that one is comparing orders of sentient beings potentially comparable to the difference between an ant and a man.[68] A deva is no more visible to a man, than a man is to an ant, even though the latter may be crawling across his hand. The argument works the other way too. When was the last time you communicated with an ant? Yet ants and human beings inhabit the same terrestrial space. Thus, it is not necessarily true that the planes of samsara are ontologically separate, any more than the higher dimensions of strings are separated from space and time in string theory. All of the dimensions may co-exist and yet be invisible to each other. Similarly, we have millions of radio and television programs and cell phone conversations passing through our bodies right now, but we do not perceive them. Perhaps this is the reason why we have yet to "discover" extraterrestrial civilizations, some of which must be millions or even billions of years older than Homo sapiens. Perhaps they are right here, right now, but we simply cannot see them.

In order to appreciate a higher-energy being, one must adjust one's own energy-vibration-frequency to their level. This is possible in theory by concentrating consciousness, increasing its "vibration." Mind itself is the universal substrate of reality. Thus, all of reality is, in principle, accessible to it. This can be achieved through meditation or a variety of mind-altering techniques, both physical and psychological, including the ingestion of psychedelic substances, but one's perceptions will be limited by one's cognitive capacity, which is largely a matter of karma, since all human beings are capable of enlightenment in principle. This capability is

[68] Ants appeared in the evolutionary record about a hundred million years ago. Homo appeared about 2.5 million years ago. Consequently, the difference between ants and men is only about 97.5 million years, far less than the life span of devas, so it is clear that the difference between devas and men is of an order of magnitude far greater than that between ants and men.

the tathagatagarbha, the Buddha-potentiality. On the other hand, a buddha has transcended samsara completely. Therefore, he is able to travel in a "mental body" to any part of samsara and communicate with the beings that inhabit other realms without limitation or distortion. Thus, he has a perfect understanding and knowledge of reality.

When we consider spiritual development in this way, from the perspective of Buddhist cosmology, we see that we must "ascend" the "great chain of being" from the realm that we inhabit, the so-called earth realm, step by step. The life of the Bodhisattva Gautama is the paradigm of this process in the current eon. Even Gautama experienced two false starts before attaining enlightenment, after renouncing the world at the age of 29. First, he endeavoured to achieve transcendence by refining his consciousness to the ultimate degree. Although he experienced the highest possible meditative state, the fourth formless meditation, in which he realized the highest plane of samsara, the sphere of neither perception nor non-perception (non-duality), he rejected it as unsatisfactory. Subsequently he plunged into a multi-year experiment in extreme asceticism (tapas), including self-mortification, living and sleeping in charnel grounds, mind control, breath control, and extreme fasting. Despite all this effort, all he achieved was bringing himself to the verge of dying. It was only after rejecting all of these practices as intrinsically worthless that he approached the periphery of enlightenment. He simply sat beneath a tree, and practised mindfulness of the breath and the body with intense mental intention/concentration, insight, and detachment. Then he experienced his final challenge – his famous encounter with Asura Mara, his own Shadow.

The character of Mara appears to have two different aspects which may be related to the conflict between the asuras and the devas. In one aspect he is a deva, a resident of the plane of the devas that wield power over others' creations, the highest realm of the kama loka. Mara is commonly understood to be the chief of this realm; in another aspect, he is a demon or asura. It appears to be in the latter aspect that the Buddha encountered him on the cusp of his enlightenment. This story is well known and need not be repeated here. My main point is that Mara was intensely opposed to the Buddha's enlightenment, for by becoming enlightened Gautama would not only escape Mara's domination; Mara knew that he would lead countless others to do so too. Here we see the envy and hatred of the devas

for which the asuras are famous. Yet in order to become enlightened Gautama also had to conquer Mara, as the chief of the asuras who block the way to the higher planes. From this we may infer that the asuras, in their war against the devas, are also opposed to human spiritual progress. Psychologically we would say that the asuras are the personification of the blind forces of desirous attachment, the instinctual complexes that bind humanity to samsara and the animal state. Mara must be encountered and overcome in order for the spiritual quest to be successful. This is, of course, the central axiom of Tantra. All the spiritual traditions of humanity attest to this "dark night of the soul," the experience of agitation, confusion, and suffering without which the spiritual quest is fruitless. Nevertheless, as I have already mentioned, this Western psychological interpretation is only one side of the coin; the other side is the objective ontological existence of the asuras themselves. Thus, contemporary humanity is situated at a great crux. On the one hand, we can remain in the state of samsaric attachment, which is where the asuras want us to be, in the same state as the asuras themselves – ignorant, lustful, violent, and self-destructive. On the other hand, we can dare to encounter, challenge, and overcome the asuras themselves, and through an act of will, master them. This cannot be achieved by repression, however, or by reliance upon some fatuous vicarious atonement, for the asuras stand guard as sentinels at the base of Mount Sumeru, challenging and obstructing all those who endeavour to ascend to its peaks. They cannot be evaded or avoided. They arise out of the watery depths of the collective unconscious, and strive with all their power and might to possess and overwhelm all those who dare challenge them, dragging us down into the very chaos in which they exist themselves. This is the lesson par excellence of the enlightenment of the Buddha.

One is struck by the profound correspondence between Buddhist cosmology and the post-Newtonian scientific understanding of the nature of reality. This is all the more remarkable when one compares the Aryan cosmo-conception with the Semitic worldview, with its limited notions of a 6,000 year old universe, creation biology, flood geology, the unique spiritual status of the human species, racialism ("the chosen race"), geocentricity, etc., which led to the blood feud between the new science and the Church that in turn has led to the virtual abandonment of any notion of a vertical (spiritual) axis of existence in the West. This has led to

the disasters of scientism, philosophical materialism, "scientific" socialism, social Darwinism, and fascism, the results of which not only threaten human civilization, but the very survival of the planet itself. I have documented some of these remarkable correspondences, including:

- The reality of astronomical distances and vast cycles of time, including other stars, worlds, and sentient beings throughout the universe and beyond;
- Interstellar space;
- The big bang and the expansion, contraction, and ultimate destruction of, not just this universe, but many universes besides our own;
- The extent of the solar system;
- That reality has no origin and no creator;
- The ubiquity of the law of causality;
- The complete interdependence of phenomena, which was only proved in the 1960s by Bell's Theorem;
- Periodic destruction of planets by supernovas;
- The reality of higher dimensions, characterized by different frequencies or vibrations of energy, all real but many of which are invisible and intangible to each other;
- Time dilation;
- The non-reality of matter; virtuality;
- The non-uniqueness of human sentience;
- Multiple human species;
- The primacy of the mind (the quantum act of observation);
- Process philosophy;
- Continental drift;
- Vast cycles of terrestrial, historical time, characterized by periodic world cataclysms;
- One world ocean;
- The universality of sentience and thus the complete interconnectedness of all living beings, with no essential difference between them;
- The genetically programmed longevity of Homo sapiens of 120 years;
- The reality of air and space travel;

- And, finally, the reality of psychic abilities, which are just beginning to be studied and classified by science.

I hope the foregoing will convince even the most skeptical that the belief, prevalent in some schools of religious Buddhism, and based on an over-reliance on two texts, that the Buddha did not teach a theory of the nature of reality, is factually false. Thus, we may open our minds up to the realization that we do not pursue meditation in a vacuum. Spiritual development is not a purely mental or subjective activity. Rather, it expresses a profoundly real universal teleology through which one may discover, not merely abstract metaphysical or psychological insights, but profound realizations concerning the fundamental nature of what we choose to call "physical" reality.

APPENDIX

At the request of a student I have added the following account of the preta world, i.e., the world of the spirits of the dead, commonly but mistakenly referred to as "hungry ghosts," from the Chinese èguǐ. The pretas inhabit the paraloka or "other world," and are characterized by insatiable hunger and thirst as well as being subject to immoderate heat and cold. This is one of the six classes of rebirth, one of the "unhappy destinations" below the human but above hell beings. Mostly they dwell on the earth, in desert and waste places, and thus may be counted as a "near-earth" realm, though they are normally invisible to humans, except when one is in a certain mental state. When they manifest, it can happen at any time, day or night, and they might be recognized by their family members. On the other hand, we are visible to them. Typically resembling humans, pretas often look emaciated, similar to the classic depiction of zombies, though they can also take on the forms of smoke or fire. The smoke monster in the TV series "Lost," which includes numerous Buddhist themes, is portrayed in the likeness of a preta. They have huge appetites but are unable to satisfy themselves, and feed on revolting and disgusting substances like corpses and feces. Some pretas prey on human blood, like the vampire. Reincarnation as a preta is determined by karma, just like all forms of rebirth, and is particularly influenced by actions such as dishonesty, corruption, obsession, deceit, jealousy, greed, and addiction.

These beings are generally pitiable, and people frequently make food offerings to them in temples and other places. However, an offering directly given cannot benefit a preta – the merit of the offering must be transferred also. This detail is intriguing because it indicates that the concept of dedicating merit (punyaparinamana) was already established by the time the Petavatthu ("Stories of the Departed") was included in the Minor Anthologies (Khuddaka Nikaya) of the Pali Canon, composed, perhaps 150 years or so after the passing (parinirvana) of the Buddha,[69] although others place it as recently as the 2nd century BCE. Therefore, the perspective held by some early scholars that transferring merit is exclusively a Mahayana practice and that it originated late (5th to 7th centuries CE) is clearly disprove.

[69] Law, *History of Pali Literature,* 36.

12
Beyond Good and Evil
The Story of Angulimala

Certainly the most notorious and interesting arhant in the Pali Canon is Angulimala, whose name literally means "finger garland," in allusion to his reputed habit of killing passersby in the Jalini Forest and wearing a garland or necklace of their finger bones before entering the Buddhist sangha and attaining nirvana. This story, startling and even macabre, is highly paradoxical and serves as an invaluable indication of original Buddhist beliefs concerning the nature of enlightenment, karma, and the Act of Truth. The story is so distasteful and unconventional that its historicity seems as certain as it can be, and the confusion that resists any conventional explanation suggests a deeper meaning, as has been proposed by Buddhist scholar Richard Gombrich.

First, let's summarize the conventional story as it appears in the Pali Canon and its commentaries. Angulimala, whose birth name was changed from Himsaka ("harmful") to Ahimsaka ("the harmless one"), was the son of the brahman Bhaggava Gagga and his wife Mantani. Bhaggava was a spiritual adviser (sometimes rendered "chaplain") to King Pasenadi of Kosala, one of the sixteen great regions of ancient India from which the Buddha himself came. Pasenadi himself was a disciple of the Buddha who was subsequently dethroned by another of his advisers and died of exposure while trying to regain his throne. Kosala was later annexed by the Magadha kingdom after a series of wars.

In accordance with the custom of the time, Ahimsaka's horoscope was cast when he was born and it was discovered that he was born under the nakshatra ("lunar mansion") Aslesha, the so-called "robber constellation," corresponding to the second and third decanates of Leo in Western

astrology, which predestined him (according to the sutta) to a life of violence and criminality. Aslesha is, however, not only associated with robbery. It is also associated with sorcery, a fact the significance of which will become clear. The name Ahimsaka was chosen by his parents in order to attempt to circumvent this. He was sent to the great university of Takkasila, where he became the best student of his teacher. Generally, a student entered Takshashila at the age of sixteen. The Vedas and the Eighteen Silpas or Arts, which included skills such as archery, hunting, and elephant lore, were taught, in addition to its law school, medical school, and school of military science. The institution is very significant in Buddhist tradition since it is believed that Mahayana Buddhism took shape there.

So far the story is quite unexceptional and believable. However, according to the commentaries Ahimsaka, who appears to have been charismatic and attractive to women, became embroiled in a scandal in which he was accused of having an affair with his teacher's wife. Whether this was true or not, his teacher, who is presented in the sutta as a fool, believed it and demanded that Ahimsaka complete his instruction by giving him the bizarre gift of one thousand human fingers. Bound by the ancient rule of fealty to the guru, Ahimsaka was obliged to comply with his teacher's maliciously motivated demand, which in turn activated Ahimsaka's innate predisposition to violence. Ahimsaka then went to the Jalini Forest where he became a serial killer, described as a bandit in the Angulimala Sutta. He was one finger short of fulfilling this project by murdering his own mother when he met the Buddha.

The absurdity of the foregoing story is palpable, and Richard Gombrich has suggested as an alternative that in fact Ahimsaka was an early Tantric practitioner, the left-hand form of which included ritual sex and even murder in an attempt to free oneself from all human limitations and to awaken the innate divine shakti. In this context, the fact that Takkasila subsequently became the original source of the Mahayana teachings, considered heretical by the more conservative Sri Lankan redactors of the Pali Canon, is suggestive. The oldest evidence for human sacrifice in the Indian subcontinent dates back to the Bronze Age Indus Valley civilization. If this interpretation is correct, it puts the significance of the Buddha's encounter with Angulimala and the Buddha's subsequent acceptance of him in a completely different light.

The Angulimala Sutta tells the story of how the Buddha, in the 20th year of his ministry, i.e., about 425 BCE, after the alms round, left Savatthi on the road that led directly to Ahimsaka, now called Angulimala, described as a bloody-handed, violent, merciless mass murderer, despite warnings from the local people not to go. This was not a casual outing.[70]

It seems clear the Buddha's intention was to confront Angulimala directly. However, the Buddha's interaction with Angulimala is peculiar. Angulimala comes running up behind the Buddha, calling on him to stop – a rather peculiar thing for a bandit to do. The Buddha is said to have replied to Angulimala, and said, "I have stopped, Angulimala. You too stop!" Startled and intrigued by the Buddha's reply, and perhaps recognizing the Buddha as a holy man, instead of killing him Angulimala asks the Buddha what he is talking about, whereupon the Buddha delivers a sermon to Angulimala on the nature and significance of "stopping," i.e., the transcendence of karma and samsara and the attainment of nirvana, whereupon Angulimala declares, "at long last this recluse, a venerated sage, has come to this great forest for my sake." Angulimala then converts to the dharma and becomes the Buddha's personal attendant. According to the Theragatha (879) it seems that Angulimala's ordination name was the same as his birth name, Ahimsaka, the Harmless One.

If Angulimala were an ordinary murderer, the foregoing story makes no sense at all. To all appearances, the Buddha is rewarding a psychopathic serial killer with the gift of ordination in the sangha and allowing him to become his personal attendant, even giving him the name Angulimala as his monastic name. In fact, this is how the Buddha's actions were perceived by the local people, at whose insistence the Buddha agreed to amend the Vinaya to prohibit criminals from being allowed to be ordained in the Buddhist sangha, which begs the question even more forcefully why

[70] Nyanaponika and Hecker, *Great Disciples of the Buddha,*323 say that this was 30 "miles," but other sources refer to 30 *yojanas,* the traditional Indian measure of distance, probably 12 to 13 km (referring to *yojanas* as miles is common in popular English translations). Thus, the Buddha may have walked as far as about 375 km (233 miles), which at normal walking speed might have taken roughly 10 days. According to G.K. Ananda Kumarasiri, Jalini Forest was located on the western border of Kosala, corresponding to modern Awadh, in Uttar Pradesh. Jetavana Monastery was less than a kilometre north-east of Savatthi, approximately 70 km (43 miles) east of the Serayu (modern Ghaghara) River, beyond the farther bank of which the western boundary of Kosala extended.

the Buddha did it in the first place. However, the Buddha did not stop there. After returning to Jetavana Monastery with Angulimala as his personal attendant, the Buddha defended Angulimala to King Pasenadi, followed by another bizarre story that also seems to have a deeper implication.

While begging for alms in Savatthi, Angulimala sees a woman giving birth to a deformed child (some translators interpret this as referring to a painful or difficult labour). Once again, the macabre seems to follow Angulimala wherever he goes. After telling the Buddha about this, the Buddha tells Angulimala to work an Act of Truth. The Act of Truth, also described in the Jatakas, is a pan-Indian notion based on the belief that truth (dharma) has an intrinsic power that can be called upon to produce apparently miraculous effects based ultimately on the law of karma. It may also be described as the law of righteousness and was the basis of Mahatma Gandhi's political strategy that he called satyagraha. The Buddha instructed Angulimala to return to the woman, and utter these words with the intention of healing the child: "Sister, since I was born I do not recall that I have ever intentionally deprived a living being of life. By this truth, may you be well and may your infant be well!"[71]

What is most bizarre about this is that, based on the story, the Buddha was instructing Angulimala to lie, something that a buddha is supposed to be incapable of doing. The obvious contradiction is immediately resolved in the sutta by having Angulimala point out to the Buddha [sic] that this was a lie, whereupon the Buddha amended the words to "since I was born with the noble birth," thus turning the Act of Truth into a pun based on the significance of Angulimala's dramatic transformation. However, a more plausible explanation is that Angulimala was in fact not a mass murderer at all, and that the whole sutta is an elaborate confabulation based on an original story that was so unacceptable to the redactors of the Pali Canon that it had to be suppressed. Subsequently, Angulimala is represented as attaining nirvana after a relatively short time, thus completing the transformation from a notorious bandit to an arhant. According to the Dhammapadatthakatha, Angulimala died soon after.

[71] This passage also attests to the power of mantra within the Pali Canon, and is perhaps the root of the doctrine of the transfer of merit (parinamana).

The Angulimala Sutta also provides a fascinating insight into the inner workings of karma, for even after achieving nirvana no one, not even an arhant or a buddha, is exempt from the inexorable operation of the law of karma. Thus, one morning during the alms round a crowd gathered around Angulimala and started throwing objects at him, including a clod of earth, a stone or a stick, and a potsherd, cutting his head, breaking his bowl, and tearing his outer robe. When he returned to the Buddha in this state the Buddha told him, "Bear it, brahmin! Bear it, brahmin! You are experiencing here and now the result of deeds because of which you might have been tortured in hell for many years, for many hundreds of years, for many thousands of years."[72] The commentaries explain that not even an arhant or a buddha is exempt from karma, even the Buddha himself having been injured after an attack by his cousin Devadatta, who blamed the Buddha for not enforcing a more rigorous Vinaya on the sangha, including strict vegetarianism, which the Buddha rejected. However, a deeper implication appears as well, for, if past karmas must work themselves out even in the case of an arhant, and arhantship represents the final rebirth of an emancipated being, and if even a murderer can become an arhant, all of which follow logically from the story, then it also follows that it may be that an arhant may be severely afflicted by all of the unresolved karmas of his past births, thus having the appearance of being the very opposite of an arhant, an anti-arhant in fact. It appears that Angulimala was an arhant of just this type.

Such considerations lead us directly to considerations of Tantra,[73] which would subsequently develop into the Vajrayana tradition and, in Tibet, the mahasiddhas, including adept practitioners of the type represented by Padmasambhava and others, whose appearance and behaviour were directly contradictory to conventional ideas of enlightenment. Was this the underlying motivation for the redactors of the Pali Canon to conceal

[72] Note the surprising equation of being beaten up by a small mob, in which one's head is cut, one's bowl broken, and one's robe torn, with hundreds or even thousands of years in hell, the latter presumably the result of Angulimala's murder spree.

[73] Some scholars have criticized Gombrich's references to proto-Tantra in the 5th cent. BCE, but D.D. Kosambi asserts that human sacrifice and orgiastic rites were both practised at this time and explicitly associates them with proto-Tantra. Similarly, Hajime Nakamura says, "Already in Early Buddhism we find a form of Esoteric Buddhism [Tantra] in its incipient stage" (*Indian Buddhism*, p.314).

the person of Angulimala beneath the absurd self-contradictions and bizarre self-justifications of the sutta commentaries? They could not deny the historicity of Angulimala. The Vinaya itself attests to his existence, but they desperately tried to whitewash the real story with the story of a murderer whose evil life was transformed by the miraculous beneficence of the Buddha, which bizarrely has become one of the most famous children's stories of Theravada Buddhism.

So what are we to make of the story of Angulimala in the light of the foregoing? I suggest that Angulimala was in fact born under the nakshatra of Aslesha, and subsequently studied some sort of proto-Tantric spirituality under a guru at Takshashila, where he was initiated into sexual yoga and acquired a reputation as a brilliant student and a highly realized practitioner. This is more than hinted at when his guru instructs him to make a necklace of human fingers in order to make the science that he has learned efficacious. Tantrics, including Padmasambhava, typically spent years meditating in charnel grounds where the construction of such a necklace would have been easy. Perhaps this was the token by which his final meditations were completed. Interestingly, one of the austere practices (dhutanga) to which Angulimala was committed after becoming a Buddhist monk included meditating in cemeteries.

After the completion of his studies he became a solitary forest dweller in Jalini, inspiring the veneration and fear of the local people. So great was his reputation that he came to the attention of the Buddha in Savatthi, who made the trek into the wilderness to visit him. This is in itself extremely unusual, the Pali Canon usually representing officials and people as visiting the Buddha, not the reverse. When the Buddha met Angulimala, he recognized him as an advanced spiritual practitioner and instructed him in the Buddhadharma, and Angulimala in turn was so impressed that he became a Buddhist monk and the personal attendant of the Buddha, and they returned to Savatthi together. Subsequently Angulimala attained nirvana and became an arhant, but also incited the violent enmity of the crowd due to his reputation as a Tantric sorcerer. The Buddha, however, recognized him as a powerful Tantric healer and explicitly declared by means of the Act of Truth that in fact Angulimala was innocent of any crimes. To placate the crowd the Buddha also agreed to prohibit criminals from entering the sangha. All of this was subsequently covered up by the redactors of the Pali Canon, who could

not accept that the Buddha would thus honour a Tantric practitioner, even if he did convert to the Buddhadharma. This is not the only place in the Pali Canon where the Buddha speaks positively about Tantra. In the Ambattha Sutta, he refers positively to Kanha, a black man and the son of a slave girl who became a powerful shaman. The Khandhasamyutta refers to the skull-bowl, a ritual implement broadly associated with Tantra.

Note

The award-winning Thai movie, *Angulimala,* is a powerful and beautiful, but highly speculative and somewhat controversial interpretation of the Angulimala Sutta.

13
Buddhism and the UFO Phenomenon

I

Before we begin tonight's topic, I wanted to address an interesting question that was submitted to me through the suggestion box. It reads as follows, with a few minor editorial corrections:

> What about the importance of superstitious elements in Buddhist texts and teachings?
>
> As example, the "phenomena" that happened around Buddha's death? The "body-signs," that allow [one] to recognize a "holy" person?
>
> The claim about "transcendental realms." Nobody knows such things for sure.
>
> My standpoint here is: It is better never to forget the scientific rule: Stay at things that every time can be proven.
>
> (And simply to say, "Yet you did not meditate enough" for explaining why a person cannot accept some sayings is a not an acceptable answer.)
>
> Simply to claim a bunch of things that nobody can prove is the typical sign for religion. And I think, in such a case nobody needs Buddhism in the west. There are already enough religions around.
>
> At one side it is maybe a good idea to bring Buddhist ideas to a wider social stratum, with "popular and easy to understand ideas."
>
> But the negative side is: The core of the teaching is blurred into an almost useless palaver.

> At least in Germany there is a saying: Give people a set of philosophical ideas, and they will make a religion from it.

This is a vexed question to be sure. The writer declares that there are superstitious elements in Buddhism and gives examples, but they don't give a definition. The question includes a number of hidden (or not so hidden) assumptions, including that nobody knows anything about transcendental realms, that we should never forget the scientific rule [sic] that we should "stay at" things that can be proved (which they have already violated in the previous assumption; you can't prove a negative), that saying that you need to meditate more is "not acceptable" (why not?), and that accepting things that cannot be proved (assuming of course that this is what we are doing) is the sign of a religion and thus automatically bad (there is also no explanation of why religion is bad). There is also the highly doubtful assumption that religion is just a collection of unprovable assertions, neglecting the obvious historical fact that religion emerges directly out of human experience, often involving thousands or even millions of people. The question is ultimately ethical, revealed by the use of words like "should," "better," and "acceptable."

The implicit assertion is that some aspects of Buddhism are superstitious because they are not proved, and that this should not be accepted because only things based on reason, science, and evidence should be accepted.

The view implicit in this question is familiar to us. It is the perspective of Western scientific rationalism, also known, somewhat pejoratively, as "scientism." Only science is true, therefore, only things proved by science should be accepted as true and only such truths have value. Nothing else should be accepted. This is the literal meaning of "superstition," literally "standing outside reason." However, if we are going to evaluate this question, shouldn't we ask ourselves whether the axioms and assertions on which the question itself is based are actually true? In other words, is it in fact rational for science to claim that it and it alone is rational, and that the truths that it discovers are the only truths that exist? Moreover, is reason itself self-evidently perfect and complete? In other words, is it true that scientific rationalism is the sole and exclusive standard of truth and value?

I would argue that the fundamental axiom that science alone is true is in fact false. Science may discover facts, but the fact that science discovers facts does not itself prove that science has discovered all facts, or that the facts discovered by science are the only facts, or that the scientific worldview derived from these facts is in fact perfect and complete. Facts themselves are notoriously tenuous. To a 19th century Newtonian Einsteinian relativity, quantum physics, and string theory are crazy, as they still are to Randian objectivists for example, yet this difference represents only a century in the whole history of science. If the history of science is any indication – and our writer appears to want us to base our beliefs on experience, not belief – the scientific worldview is not static, fixed, or absolute, but constantly changing and evolving. Therefore, how can science be set up as a standard of truth when in another 100 years it will be completely different? One thing is certain – in another million years, science will be unrecognizable to us, assuming of course we survive for another million years.

New discoveries by definition are "superstitious," in that they "stand outside reason," therefore any view based on the notion that the prevailing scientific ethos is the standard of truth is going to reject and suppress anything that contradicts that worldview. Therefore, the moment we take science as the standard of truth we kill science itself and progress ends. Aldous Huxley predicted just such a development in *Brave New World.*

Moreover, why should we assume that reason is the only arbiter of truth? Truth means the way things are, the nature of the world, the nature of reality itself. Even if we accept that reason and science do discover truths, how does it follow from this fact that only reason and science have this quality? If the premise of the question is true, i.e., that "nobody knows such things," then neither can we know that they do not exist. Thus, this question contradicts and thus refutes itself at every turn. It sets up the straw man of a perfect standard of truth that neither reason nor science can actually meet. However, there is no such standard. Therefore, the whole question falls apart based on its own premises. Open mindedness rather than disbelief is the correct conclusion.

It is not hard to think of truths that fall outside the purview of science and reason. We all appreciate the truths of great art, music, literature, and philosophy, yet all of these things would be rejected by a strictly scientistic ethic of the sort that our writer is postulating. These are all unproved and

unprovable things that are therefore superstitious and have no value according to our writer. Indeed, such an ethic is discovered upon close examination to be authoritarian and anti-humanist if not fascistic. Art, music, literature, and philosophy have also often been inspired by and inspired religion. What sort of society rejects everything metaphysical, suppresses religion, and only tolerates art, music, literature, and philosophy that serves industry, reason, and science? Attempts were made in the past century to create such a world in the USSR and in Maoist China. Are these societies ethical?

The truly rational, scientific mind does not close itself off to unproven possibilities, and fully realizes that science is a human enterprise that only describes a small, although basic, fraction of reality. Reason itself can never comprehend ultimate reality because it is inherently restricted by arbitrary linguistic conventions that are rooted in human biological evolution. Why should we assume that the human brain is even capable of comprehending reality, any more than we assume that a mosquito can appreciate Bach? The fact that we can, apparently, do so is in fact a great mystery and the stuff of mysticism.

So what about superstitious elements in Buddhist texts and teachings? Since superstition "stands outside reason," a text or a teaching only becomes superstitious when it is not understood. Science itself becomes superstitious when it is not understood, as I have shown. Therefore, there are no texts or teachings in Buddhism that are inherently superstitious. There are only texts and teachings that are not understood. They only become superstitious when used or misused in a certain way. Otherwise, they are just texts and teachings. The question then becomes, how do we understand Buddhist texts and teachings? The first example mentioned apparently refers to the tradition that the Buddha's pyre could not be lit until Mahakassapa arrived, and that it then burst into flame spontaneously. Ok, let's look at this story or tradition. We might doubt that this incident occurred historically, but this only makes it superstitious if we understand this story historically. There are those who would argue that only the historical frame of reference is "valid." Once again, we have an ethical judgement masquerading as an axiomatic assertion. I think that it fails for much the same reason that assertion that science is the only valid standard of truth fails. So how else can we understand this story of the Buddha's pyre? In fact, this story can be

understood symbolically, as an expression of Mahakassapa's importance to the sangha or even as an expression of the intensely energetic nature of the Buddha's attainment and the extraordinary significance of the parinirvana. It might even be understood as an exaggeration of something that "actually" happened. I am thinking of a somewhat similar story about the death of Ramakrishna, that after he died his collarbone was actually hot to the touch. Truth may be communicated in many different ways, not only historically. To say that only historical truths have value is itself superstitious. Human language, history, psychology, theology, and art all attest to the extraordinary importance of symbolism and mythology in human communication.

This question further undermines itself because, in setting up science and reason as the sole standards of truth it sets up scientific rationalism as a new religion, even as it rejects religion. Thus, the question refutes itself.

The Buddha does not simply state that a bunch of things are true. Belief in the truth of a bunch of arbitrary things has no particular merit in Buddhism. The Buddha invites us to investigate the truth of the dharma and thus arrive at its truth through questioning and direct experience. Buddhist confidence is not based on faith, it is based on analysis and experience, and only when you have inquired into the dharma deeply and proved it to yourself will you or should you have confidence in it. If you want to find out about the truth of spiritual experience and the transcendental realms, you can find out for yourself. The Buddha doesn't demand that you "believe" anything, but like all systems of knowledge, there is a degree of trust involved in the beginning. The same is true of science. The language of science is mathematics. How can one "prove" that mathematics – a human construct – is the language of reality? The fact is, one cannot. It is a faith but it works, so it is accepted. However, what this writer is advocating in his "question" is the very opposite of questioning. Rather, it based on a dogmatic belief in science and reason that does not withstand questioning, combined with an uncritical notion of what Buddhism actually is. Certainly, Buddhism can be as uncritical and naïve as the writer implies, but this does not prove that this is what Buddhism actually is or should be, but only how superstitious and religious people can use or misuse it.

So what about the importance of superstitious elements in Buddhist texts and teachings? I say, investigate them until you find their inherent merit and truth. Then they are no longer superstitious, because they have been looked into rationally. Because reason and science both indicate that not everything is subject to observation and experiment or even knowable, it is better to be open-minded about the infinite possibilities of experience and the modes of knowledge itself, including rationality, language, symbolism, and direct experiential realization. I also think that this is the authentically scientific attitude. Interestingly, it is also the attitude that an increasing number of people are taking to the UFO phenomenon, which makes a nice segue to the topic of tonight's discussion.

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In his YouTube video, "Buddhism and Alien Abductions," the independent Buddhist monk Ajahn Brahm, who has also stirred the pot on the topic of female ordination in Thailand, broached the topic of the so-called UFO contact experience, declaring that while he has never seen a UFO he has seen garudas and nagas. Garudas are enormous predatory birds with intelligence and social organization. Nagas are snakes or dragons that live in lakes or underground streams and are said to guard treasures. A famous naga even petitioned the Buddha to become a monastic. Several Buddhist saints including Gotama himself have been identified with nagas, which can take human form at will (Brahm's naga was an impossibly huge snake that he saw in the Asian rainforest). The Buddha himself says that the naga is a symbol of the arhant.[74]

No less impeccable an authority than A.K. Warder says that the statement of no less impeccable a Buddhist king than the great Ashoka himself that by the king's conversion to the dharma the gods are "mixing" with humanity refers to an ancient UFO flap. Of course, Warder does not use this exact terminology but the implication is clear to anyone who is familiar with the UFO phenomenon. Perhaps surprisingly, it is also supported by the Pali suttas. Warder writes,

[74] MN 23.

> The most likely reference would appear to be to divine portents seen by men, indicating the presence of gods, such as the light and radiance said to precede an appearance of Brahma.... Perhaps Asoka was watching hopefully for the 'wheel gem,'... to appear in the sky, and he may have been encouraged by celestial phenomena, such as the appearance of a comet, a nova, or an exceptional display of meteors, to believe that his change of heart and of imperial policy had begun to make itself felt in the universe. That gods might appear to men was widely believed in India in this period.[75]

Nor is this the only UFO account associated with Buddhism. The great Buddhist reformer Nichiren avoided execution due to the appearance of a UFO that appeared in the sky like the full moon. In the 19th century, the great Chinese Zen Buddhist master Xu Yun Da Shi climbed Da Luo Peak, where he witnessed numerous UFOs, which he called "wisdom lamps." Doubtless other examples could be found.

Human beings have described contact experiences with all sorts of mythological beings throughout history. We know these as faires, elves, pixies, gnomes, and other special terms for demigods and quasi-supernatural beings that appear infrequently and interact with humans in various ways. In ancient times, such experiences seem to have been more prevalent than they are today, but as we shall see this may not be the case. Dr. W.Y. Evans-Wentz made a special study of the "fairy faith" in Ireland, and concluded, based on analyzing numerous credible firsthand accounts, that such experiences are less easily dismissed than many might like to believe and that they exhibit their own internal consistency. Native Americans, East Indians, Asians, and indeed all of the peoples of the world describe similar beings, which are often said to interact with human beings, abducting people and children and leaving physical signs behind. There are even accounts of sexual relationships, both voluntary and involuntary, with such beings.

Interestingly, Buddhism also refers to such beings. In Buddhist vertical cosmology the realm, plane, world, or dimension – I will use these terms more or less interchangeably – next above our own world, and separated from us by the thinnest of veils, is the realm called the Four Great Kings. The Four Great Kings are devas or spiritual beings, described as luminous aerial beings, attributed to the four directions and to the four elements

[75] *Indian Buddhism,* 239f.

that we know as fire, water, air, and earth – a universal archetype. Thus, the realm of the Four Great Kings is an elemental nature realm. The denizens of this realm resemble the aforementioned fairies, which are also said to be luminous and aerial, including references to deva cities and extensive interactions with humans. The devas are even said to travel in "cars fit for the gods."[76]

In addition to the realm of the Four Great Kings, the Buddhist texts also refer to "earthbound devas" that coexist with people. These are described as socially organized; invisible, although they can make themselves visible if they choose; telepathic and able to influence people and even governments at will; and preferring to live in ancient cities or remote wilderness areas. Earthbound devas are a distinct class of being and should not be confused with either ghosts or hell beings.[77]

Finally, the Buddhist texts refer to the asuras, another class of beings who were expelled from the higher spiritual realms and which inhabit the earth, especially the water or where earth and water meet. These are very advanced and intelligent spiritual beings but their spirituality is oriented toward self-love, power, hedonistic enjoyment, and competition – what we in the West might term "pagan." They are very ambitious; barbaric despite their spiritual development; and jealous of higher spiritual beings; many hate people, although the texts also make a point that some asuras honour the Buddha and may even be Buddhists. Although in appearance and behaviour they are similar to the Judaic notion of demons, in Buddhism asuras and hell-beings or demons are also distinct classes of being. The Buddhist hells – really, purgatories – and their inhabitants occupy four levels below the human and three below the asuras, below the ghosts and the animals. The asuras adjoin the human realm, although they interact with human beings as well as the inhabitants of the realm of the Four Great Kings.

Even the inhabitants of the realm of the Thirty-Three Gods, next above the Four Great Kings, interact with human beings from time to time. Asuras are higher than the ghosts and the animals. One of the roles of the inhabitants of the realm of the Four Great Kings, and the Four Great Kings

[76] DN 32.

[77] See, e.g., Horner, *The Book of the Discipline,* Vol. I, lvii. Horner also refers to monastics having sexual intercourse with yakkhinis, paralleling similar UFO reports.

themselves, is to report to the Council of the Thirty-Three Gods on the progress of humanity, in a sort of cosmic hierarchy. This is all canonical.

Similarly, UFO contactees report encounters with a wide variety of different sorts of beings, some of which resemble the inhabitants of the Four Great Kings (e.g., smallish, gnome-like beings), asuras (e.g., the so-called reptilians), and even Brahmas (divine humanoid type beings). All of these beings seem to be associated with the UFO in a kind of cosmic hierarchy. Thus, UFOs themselves do not appear to represent a singular phenomenon but rather a plurality of mutually interrelated but also distinct phenomena.

All of this may be dismissed as mythology in our age of fasco-corporatism and scientistic nihilism were it not for one singular fact, which has been extensively documented by Jacques Vallée in his magnum opus, *Passport to Magonia,* and this is the detailed and extensive similarity of the experiences associated with these beings, including descriptions of the beings themselves, with the modern UFO phenomenon, including the contact experience, as well as clear descriptions of the distinctive traits of the UFO phenomenon in the early Buddhist texts themselves. The latter confirm Vallée's thesis, of which *Passport to Magonia* is an elaboration, that the UFO phenomenon, whatever else it is, is an archaic and possibly primordial human phenomenon that has been experienced and described throughout human history and that has psychological and physical aspects that clearly identify the UFO phenomenon as a real, distinct phenomenon that cannot be entirely reduced to conventional causes, including error, hoax, optical illusions, hallucinations, and mental confusion, as is widely claimed by skeptics who have not studied the data deeply or objectively.

Unfortunately, the whole field of UFO studies has become sensationalized and popularized to the point where it is almost impossible to see it clearly. It has become the tool of an incredible variety of agendas, some of which are based on outright lies and deceptions. Even governments have become involved. Because of this confusion, the majority of the population do not take this phenomenon seriously. However, anyone who takes the trouble to study the available information objectively will quickly discover that this is a mistake. One must, however, select one's resources carefully, since there is so much disinformation, especially on the internet.

I certainly don't claim to be an expert in this field or to have exhausted the available resources, but the researchers that I have personally found to be most credible include astronomer and computer scientist Dr. Jacques Vallée; astronomer Dr. J. Allen Hynek; psychologist Dr. Carl Gustav Jung; Harvard professor and psychiatrist Dr. John Mack; nuclear physicist Stanton Friedman; English Professor Karla Turner; and anthropologist Dr. W.Y. Evans-Wentz. I would also mention string theorist Dr. Michio Kaku in this regard, who has hinted quite broadly that he knows something about this topic. Colin Wilson's book, *Alien Dawn,* is a noteworthy popular summary of the evidence based on the research carried out by these individuals. The work of Whitley Strieber is also interesting. Vallée himself claims to represent an "invisible college" of about a hundred scientists who are privately researching the UFO phenomenon in all of its aspects but do not seek publicity for obvious reasons. To summarize their research in detail goes beyond our scope here, but you can look up these experts for yourself, including many videos on YouTube and buy their books if you are motivated to do so. The main thing that you will notice about these experts is that, while their conclusions are indeed revolutionary, not all agree with the prevailing popular theories about UFOs, including the view that they are extraterrestrial in origin.

Vallée in particular has argued that if these things turn out to be extra-terrestrial, he will be disappointed. His own view seems to be that they are intelligent higher-dimensional beings with a long association with humans and the earth, possibly originating beyond the space-time continuum as we understand it. Even if they originated in our universe their civilization is potentially billions of years old, compared to a mere 10,000 years for human civilization. Vallée speculates that they may have learned to master both space and time, in which case the question of their "origin" may be factually meaningless. Since civilization grows exponentially, the qualitative difference between these beings and ourselves is clearly on the order of millions of times. Such a civilization will have harnessed the zero-point energy and therefore be trans-galactic, even trans-universal or extra-dimensional in nature and not merely extraterrestrial.

However, it is not my purpose here to argue about the ultimate nature of the UFO phenomenon, which is clearly very complex, but only to

indicate that the phenomenon is real and exhibits real similarities to the Buddhist worldview, confirming Vallée's hypothesis that UFOs have appeared throughout human history. If we accept that UFOs are real, then Buddhism, along with many other religions, appears to be one of the effects of this phenomenon, at least partly, since the Buddha himself is depicted as interacting and communicating with devas or spiritual beings, to which he attributes at least some of his insights, and even appears as a UFO himself. The question that arises, therefore, and is of greatest interest to us is what the Buddhist texts themselves say about this phenomenon, and how this relates to the phenomenon that we experience today. Is there, in fact, a Buddhist theory of the UFO phenomenon?

I would also like to say that I personally did not enter into the study of the Pali Canon with any expectation that I would find any references to the UFO phenomenon. That there are such references came as a complete surprise to me, although I was vaguely aware of similar references in the Mahabharata and the Puranas. UFOlogy was a very peripheral interest of mine many years ago, but I lost interest in it until quite recently, largely because the evidence is so complex and confusing and I did not want to make UFOlogy my main study. For the record, and in the interests of disclosure, I have seen a UFO. It was a Type IIIc experience in the Vallée classification, a daylight disk in the Hynek classification. I was not contacted or abducted; it occurred in or about August 1968 (possibly a year earlier) in King City, Ontario as best as I can recall, when I was 13 or 14 years old. The experience itself was very brief – only about thirty seconds – and is the only such experience of this type that I have ever had, but it showed me that sometimes things appear in the sky that are not easily explained.

UFO references are not incidental to the Pali Canon. One of the most extensive descriptions in the Pali Canon is the Mahasudassana Sutta in the Digha Nikaya. Interestingly, most of the UFO references in the Pali suttas appear in the Digha Nikaya, which according to Buddhist scholar A.K. Warder consists of some of the oldest and most authentic Buddhist texts. This sutta immediately follows the Mahaparinirvana Sutta, which describes the death of the Buddha. Mahasudassana consists of maha, 'great,' plus sudassana, 'easily seen,' 'having a good appearance,' the proper name of the gods of the plane of the Beautiful Devas, the third Pure Abode of the Rupaloka or world of form. Walshe translates it as "The Great

Splendour." Rhys Davids has "The Great King of Glory." The language is more than suggestive.

This sutta was spoken in the Mallas' sal grove at Kusinara, Kosala, shortly before the Buddha's death in the same place, and is therefore one of the last sermons of the Buddha. The occasion is that Ananda is unhappy that the Buddha is going to die here, "in this miserable little town of wattle and daub, right in the jungle in the back of beyond," rather than in a great city where the Buddha's funeral can be arranged by his rich followers in proper style. In response, the Buddha tells Ananda the story of King Mahasudassana, who dominated the region; Kusinara, called at that time Kusavati, was his capital. The Buddha compares Kusavati to the deva city of Alakamanda, thus asserting that devas live in cities and introducing the topic of devas into the discourse.

The king was clearly devout, as he went up to the verandah on the roof of his palace after washing his head on the day of the full moon, with the intention of fasting. It is of course well-known that fasting sensitizes the consciousness to spiritual matters, which is why it is prescribed at such times. At that time a "divine Wheel Treasure appeared to him, thousand spoked, complete with felloe, hub and all appurtenances." A.K. Warder clearly accepts Rhys-Davids's contention that this refers to the disk of the sun. It is also a classic description of a UFO. The description is striking, and is clearly similar to the well-known vision of Ezekiel in the Hebrew Bible.

The king realizes that the appearance of such an object – there is no suggestion that the wheel is anything else – is a sign that he will become a World Ruler, and he formulates the intention to become a World Ruler as an Act of Truth. Sprinkling the wheel with water, so it must have been quite small and close,[78] the wheel then moves in the four directions, plunging in and out of the sea, like modern UFOs, and wherever the wheel goes the king travels with his army and conquers the land without bloodshed, whereupon the king establishes a peaceful dharma empire for himself based on the fundamental legal principles of pansil – do not kill, do not steal, do not commit adultery, do not lie, do not drink alcohol, plus moderation in eating. Thus, he conquers all of the lands from sea to sea,

[78] Credible contemporary accounts of "sphere UFOs" describe them as about 3 feet in diameter and approaching people as close as 10 to 15 feet. See Kirkpatrick, "UAP Reporting Trends, 1996–2023" in All-domain Anomaly Resolution Office (AARO).

i.e., the whole Indian subcontinent called Jambudvipa. Finally the wheel returns to Kusavati and hovers above the king's palace, which also doubles as a court of justice. Thus, the solar wheel treasure (or 'gem' in Warder's translation) became a kind of omen or totem of a righteous World Ruler based on the rule of dharma.

The Sakkapanha Sutta describes another luminous aerial display in which the devas instantaneously transport themselves from the realm of the Thirty-Three Gods to Mount Vediya, where the Buddha is: "Then a tremendous light shone over Mount Vediya, illuminating the village of Amasanda – so great was the power of the devas – so that in the surrounding villages they were saying: 'Look, Mount Vediya is on fire today – it's burning! It's in flames. What is the matter, that Mount Vediya and Ambasanda are lit up like this?' and then were so terrified that their hair stood on end."

The suttas also refer to how the devas experience time at a slower rate than human beings, suggestive of Einstein's time dilation paradox. The devas also occupy space in a peculiar way, in that a vast number of devas can manifest in a very small space. We have already mentioned how the devas prefer wilderness areas, a characteristic shared with UFOs. UFOs also appear to have a telepathic rapport with the people who observe them, like the devas. Brahma appears as an unpredictable luminous aerial display, and the Buddha is described as a flying UFO casting off beams of light.

The great and still unresolved question of course is what are these objects? Vallée suggests that the UFO phenomenon acts like a control system, and that UFOs appear more frequently when the fundamental ideological paradigm of human civilization shifts toward scientific rationalism and materialism. Vallée also associates the appearance of UFOs with apocalyptic images and the end of civilizations. Vallée suggests that UFOs seem to be interested in convincing human beings that higher dimensional beings exist, but do so in such a way that the human social order is not unduly disrupted. That is to say, they seem to have regard for the limitations of human cognition. Since Buddhism is at least in part a result of UFO influence, and is ancient, untainted by modern influences, its explanation is of interest with the caveat that it is well-known that at least some UFOs also lie, or combine truth and falsehood in various ways designed to disrupt the same expectations that they create. This suggests

that they have a sophisticated agenda insofar as human beings are concerned, which is far from understood.

As I have already mentioned, Jacques Vallée hypothesized that UFOs have a long-standing historical relationship with the earth and with humanity. This alone explains the historical frequency of UFO sightings and contact experiences, their apparent interest in people, their apparent function as a control system, their ability to communicate with us at all, and the quasi-humanoid appearance of their inhabitants. Interestingly, the Aganna Sutta[79] supports just this view.

Walshe translates the title of this sutta as "On Knowledge of Beginnings." Rhys Davids has "A Book of Genesis." Here the Buddha says that periodically at long intervals the world contracts. We know of course that the classical view of modern scientific cosmology is that the universe originates in a singularity, expands, and after a long time gravity forces it to contract back into the original singularity, repeating forever. According to the Buddha, when the world contracts beings are mostly reborn in the Abhassara Brahma world. The name of this world literally means "radiant" or "shining." This is the seventeenth plane of Buddhist cosmology, the sixth realm from the bottom of the Rupaloka, next above the Brahma realms, and twelve planes above the human realm. It is also associated with the second jhana of "thoughtless bliss."

So, the Buddha says, "there they dwell, mind-made, feeding on delight, self-luminous, moving through the air, glorious – and they stay like that for a very long time. Eventually, after a very long time, this world begins to expand again. At a time of expansion, the beings from the Abhassara Brahma world, having passed away from there, are mostly reborn in this world. Here they dwell, mind-made, feeding on delight, self-luminous, moving through the air, glorious – and they stay like that for a very long time."

This passage clearly indicates the operation of karma. As the universe contracts, suffering increases, and beings degenerate, thus expiating much of their negative karma. As a result, human beings are reborn in the realm of the radiant devas as luminous aerial beings. After a long time, their good karma is exhausted and they are reborn when our universe begins to expand again, still retaining their energetic appearance. Thus, the Big

[79] Primordial Sutta, DN 27.

Bang may be regarded as a tunnel or conduit from a higher dimensional world, through which these luminous aerial beings entered into our universe approximately 14 billion years ago. These are the spiritual ancestors of humanity, the original human beings, and therefore also our true nature, "the clear light." Plato has a precisely similar notion when he describes human beings' original nature as bisexual flying spheres. The Buddha also specifically states that these beings are neither male or female, also stated by Jesus.

According to the Platonic worldview,

> in primal times people had double bodies, with faces and limbs turned away from one another. As spherical creatures who wheeled around like clowns doing cartwheels (190a), these original people were very powerful. There were three sexes: the all-male, the all-female, and the "androgynous," who was half male, half female. The males were said to have descended from the sun, the females from the earth and the androgynous couples from the moon. These creatures tried to scale the heights of Olympus and planned to set upon the gods (190b-c). Zeus thought about blasting them with thunderbolts, but did not want to deprive himself of their devotions and offerings, so he decided to cripple them by chopping them in half, in effect separating the two bodies.[80]

Plato's description seems to associate humans with the same war in heaven that led to the expulsion of the asuras. The fact that we find this explanation of humanity in Buddhism and in Plato's *Symposium* suggests that this is one of those archetypal ideas that characterize the primordial philosophy. Certainly, there are other examples too.

So brilliant were these beings, says that Buddha, that the sun, moon, and stars were invisible. However, this might also allude to the early expansion of the universe, before the stars appeared (about 200 million years after the Big Bang). However, as the universe cooled these beings' bodies became more and more material, and as it cooled the world evolved. Over vast eons of time, the luminous beings ingested increasingly coarse and more material foods, and as a result, their bodies became more and more physical, finally developing the sexual characteristics of male and female. Out of this came all of the institutions and the vices of human

[80] Wikipedia, "Symposium (Plato)."

society, including lust, territoriality, lying, stealing, killing, the development of the authoritarian state, social divisions, warfare, etc.

A variant of this story is repeated in sutta 26 of the Digha Nikaya. Clearly, the Buddhist symbol of the precious Wheel Treasure, the first possession of the righteous World Ruler, representing the Power of Truth and the dharma itself, is a UFO.

The Pali suttas also attest to the reality of psychic powers. Although scientism discounts such abilities, perhaps it will not surprise us at this point in the discussion to learn that the psychic powers attested to by Buddhism, including telepathic communication, astronomical visions, communication with devas, time dilation, teleportation, invisibility, the ability to pass through matter, and levitation are all attested to in the UFO literature as well as in the early Pali Buddhist suttas. Credible modern cases suggest that many of these experiences, perhaps most or even all of them, are not merely psychological, but leave physical signs and are therefore at least partly material in nature. Many UFO experiencers, especially contactees, have reported spontaneously developing many of these abilities after their UFO experiences. Clearly, reality is far more multifaceted and complex than the conventional view allows.

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According to the oldest Buddhist texts, human beings originated in the Abhassara Brahma world. Literally meaning "radiant," the Abhassara world corresponds to the second jhana, characterized by the experience of delight and joy. The Abhassara devas are given to exclamations of joy, and their bodies emit flashing rays of light like lightning. The Abhassara devas look very much alike, but have individuality. The Abhassara world transcends the periodic destruction by fire that characterizes the lower worlds at the end of each age. The Abhassara world is, however, subject to periodic destruction by water. The lifespan of these devas is 2 trillion years.

When the universe is destroyed, beings are reborn in the Abhassara realm and when the universe reappears, beings from the Abhassara realm are the first to be reborn in our universe.

The texts describe the Abhassara devas as luminous aerial objects. According to our hypothesis, they enter into our universe at the "big

bang," which an increasing number of theorists are hypothesizing is a "white hole," the terminus of a quantum tunnel that leads to a black hole in another universe. The Buddhist texts state that these beings appeared in the universe prior to the appearance of stars and galaxies, which refers to the first 200 million years of our 14 billion year old universe.

Over time, with the gradual cooling of the cosmic inflation (papanca), the Abhassara devas become increasing coarse and material, losing their luminous appearance as the stars and galaxies appear. This is attributed to their increasing infatuation with sensual pleasure. Ultimately, they appear as gendered human beings, who till the soil for food and develop territoriality, private property, the state, and all the vices associated with human beings – lust, greed, violence, warfare, etc.

Clearly, however, not all of the devas have lost all of their deva characteristics, and these coexist with us and interact with human beings, especially spiritually advanced human beings. The Buddhist texts refer to different sorts of such beings, especially the inhabitants of the Thirty-Three Gods, which appear as angelic beings; the inhabitants of the realm of the Four Great Kings, which appear as the nature spirits described by all human societies, and asuras, which are spiritually advanced beings that pursue a spirituality based on pride, arrogance, competitiveness, love of power and violence, etc. Nevertheless, at least some asuras, as well as other devas, are receptive to the dharma and venerate the Buddha and thus may be said to be Buddhists.

Although most devas are generally described as aerial and mobile, some devas are earthbound and live on the earth, mostly invisibly, especially in ancient human cities and remote wilderness areas. Sometimes these devas appear to human beings and even communicate with them. As higher dimensional beings, the human mind is an open book to them. They communicate telepathically and can influence human beings, including governments, on a subconscious level. These include the nagas, reptilian beings that can also take on a human appearance at will. Nagas are regarded as relatively advanced spiritual beings in Buddhism. Many advanced Buddhist practitioners have been claimed to be nagas (perhaps, reborn in human form), including the Buddha himself, and at least one naga sought to be ordained as a monastic (a request that the Buddha rejected, which is why candidates for Buddhist ordination are still asked if they are human).

This description is strikingly similar to the UFO phenomenon, including the manifestation of UFOs as luminous aerial phenomena, their apparent intentionality suggestive of intelligence, their ability to manifest physically and communicate with human beings telepathically, and the physical appearance of their inhabitants, which include similar beings of great nobility and beauty; smaller, gnome-like beings; and reptilian type entities. UFO inhabitants also manifest a great range of behaviours, from helpful and healing to positively malevolent and hostile, corresponding to devas and asuras respectively.

In addition to the foregoing, the Buddhist texts also describe a specific UFO-type manifestation called the Precious Wheel Treasure. The Precious Wheel Treasure symbolizes the power of truth and is associated with dharma. The manifestation of this phenomenon has all the characteristics typical of the UFO phenomenon, including luminosity, unpredictability, apparent intelligence, spiritual messages, and the classic "psychic powers" described in the Buddhist texts, including the ability to replicate and project multiple images of themselves, invisibility, the ability to pass through matter, and levitation or flying behaviour, as well as inducing astronomical visions and powers of healing and time dilation or "lost time." People who have close encounters with UFOs often report developing at least some psychic abilities themselves, and often experience personal transformative experiences characterized by enhanced creativity, compassion, and spiritual and environmental concerns, as well as clairvoyance, clairaudience, astral travel, physical travel to other realms, and telepathy, also reported in the Buddhist literature.

The coincidences between the UFO phenomenon and similar descriptions in the Buddhist suttas including the Lotus Sutra are striking and extensive. It stretches credulity to believe that these similarities are accidental. These similarities further support Jacques Vallée's hypothesis that the UFO phenomenon is ancient, perhaps even primordial, and has been experienced and described by human beings for thousands and probably tens of thousands of years at least.

14
Mahasatipatthana Sutta
The Manual of Cultivating the Great Attention

I. THEORY

This is widely regarded as one of the most important suttas in the Pali Canon, if not the most important. It appears again in nearly identical language in the Majjhima Nikaya as the Satipatthana Sutta. I would like to start by analyzing the title, which happens to include the central concept of the sutta, satipatthana. PED defines satipatthana as "intent contemplation and mindfulness, earnest thought, application of mindfulness."

Mahasatipatthana breaks down into maha + sati + patthana:

- MAHA: Great;
- SATI: Memory, mindfulness; recollection; active state of mind, fixing the mind strongly on any subject, attention, attentiveness, thought, reflection, consciousness;
- SATI is the most important word here;
- PATTHANA (nt.) Setting forth; putting forward; a starting point;
- PATTHANA: Aiming at; aspiration; desire.

The Sanskrit equivalent is smrtyu + pasthana:

- SMRTYU: Memory, awareness, remembering, remembrance, reminiscence, thinking of or upon memory, calling to mind, mindfulness;
- PASTHANA: Leading or guiding cattle, formed, modelled, wrought.

My proposed title for the sutta therefore is the Manual of Cultivating the Great Attention, based on sutta, 'discourse,' plus patthana, 'a setting forth or a putting forward,' combined with 'aiming at the starting point, or beginning,' of what is clearly a system of practice, thus a manual for cultivating awareness that aims at or aspires to the starting point or goal by means of the practice of attention or attentiveness. The word "attention" can also be readily pluralized (i.e., the Four Attentions). To my mind, this title incorporates all of the meanings summarized above in the broadest yet most succinct and accurate way. This sutta has the appearance of an early comprehensive guide to meditation for practitioners, including theory and practice that works through a series of graduated insights that cultivates the dual practice of meditation and wisdom in order to achieve final emancipation.

The Buddha is staying in a market town of the Kurus called Kammasasdhamma. This is the same place as in Mahanidana Sutta, the Great Discourse on Origination.[81] Kuru was the name of an ancient Vedic tribal union in the northwest region of the mahajanapadas. They became the first known South Asian state about 1000 BCE. There the Vedic hymns were arranged in collections, developing the orthodox rituals of Brahmanism. The legends and traditions of the Mahabharata are based on the Kurus. Its culture and politics dominated the Middle Vedic period, but after about 850 BCE its influence waned, and by the Buddha's time, it had become something of a backwater. It is significant that two major doctrines of the Buddhadharma, dependent origination and mindfulness, were taught here. Bhikkhu Nanamoli remarks that Kammasadhamma may have been near modern Delhi.

Unlike most other suttas, the Buddha is not represented as conversing with a visitor, but rather delivering a sermon directly to the monastics. The sutta simply records his sermon. No other sutta in the Digha NIkaya is like this, except for the twenty-sixth sutta, which presents the Buddha's famous advice to the monastics to be islands and refuges unto themselves with no other refuge other than the dharma, affirming that the path to emancipation, like emancipation itself, is individual. Interestingly, the Buddha says in the twenty-sixth sutta that the way to do this is by cultivating the four foundations of mindfulness.

[81] DN 15.

The Buddha declares the ekayano maggo that leads to the purification of beings from angst, the woe of existence, dukkha in Pali. This was of course the Buddha's original purpose when he abandoned the life of the world at the age of 29. This phrase is a compound of eka + yano + maggo:

- EKA: Same; certain; unknown (used for the indefinite article); one;
- YANA (YANO): Carriage, vehicle, going;
- MAGGO: Trace , track ; road , path , course , passage.

This fascinating phrase has been variously translated as 'this one way,' 'the only way,' 'the one and only way,' 'one going,' and 'a path that goes one way only.' (cf. "direct path," "right path"). Star Trek fans may note with satisfaction that the Pali word naya, here translated as 'the right path' can also be translated as 'logic.' It has long been my contention that Mister Spock was a Buddhist and Vulcan, Tibet. This 'singular way' consists of "the four foundations of mindfulness," so-called. The Pali word is satipatthana, which we discussed above. The word "foundation" is an interesting interpretation, but lacks the directed aspect of the Pali that surely characterizes the 'certain going' – setting forth, putting forward, starting point. I have therefore preferred to refer to the Four Attentions, or consciousness vectors. These consist of directing attention to the body, the feelings, the mind, and mind objects.

Body, feelings, mind, and mind-objects seem to be associated purposely, in a kind of sequence that leads from the most "outward" level of experience, including our intuition of "embodiment"; to feelings, sentient mind itself, and finally the mental corollary and polarity of "body" – mind-objects, referring to such things as numbers, logic, the Jungian archetypes, UFOs, patterns of experience, meanings, etc., that are definitively "real" but intrinsically non-physical, although they may influence the physical through a kind of feedback loop. Jung called these four qualities the four functions and the totality that they embody the psyche. Thus, body is sensation; feelings are feelings of pleasure, pain, and moral and aesthetic judgments; mind is thinking; and mind-objects are intuitions, immediate mental apprehensions that, like sensation, are simply "given."

There is also a somewhat forced correlation of the Four Attentions with the Five Aggregates of form, feeling, consciousness, perception, and mental formations, so-called.

The sutta is a meditation manual. One might even liken it to a ngondro. It lists and describes no less than twenty-one meditations, organized according to the Four Attentions – body, feelings, mind, and mind-objects in what appears to represent an intentional progression towards a goal. The core message of the sutta, however, appears in a recurring "insight," as Walshe, Nanamoli, and Bodhi all call it, which is repeated at the end of each meditation as a kind of refrain:

> [1] So he abides contemplating body as body internally, contemplating body as body externally, contemplating body and body both internally and externally. [2] He abides contemplating arising phenomena, abides contemplating vanishing phenomena in the body, he abides contemplating both arising and vanishing phenomena in the body. [3] Or else, mindfulness that "there is body" is present to him just to the extent necessary for knowledge and awareness. And he abides independent, not clinging to anything in the world. And that, monks, is how a monk abides contemplating body as body.

This text is repeated nine times throughout the sutta, thus dividing the practices up into the following divisions:

1. Breathing;
2. {Four Postures, Clear Awareness, Reflection on the Body, Four Elements, Nine Charnel Ground Contemplations};
3. Feelings;
4. Mind;
5. Five Hindrances;
6. Five Aggregates;
7. Six Sense Bases;
8. Seven Factors of Enlightenment;
9. Four Noble Truths.

1 and 2 pertain to the body, 3 to feelings, 4 to mind, and 5 through 9 refer to mind-objects.

As one can see from the description, the starting point is the grossest level – the body – of what is immediately apprehensible – the internal. Making this the basis of meditation is an innovation of the Buddhadharma, as pointed out by Buddhaghosa. As one becomes

established in one's meditation at each level, one progresses from the internal to the external, thence to both internal and external, in a sort of dialectic by which one realizes the underlying unity in duality. In the second exercise one converts the intuition of embodiment to the processes that constitute its content, contemplating phenomena as processes in their appearance and disappearance, and finally in both as complementary poles of a single process. Finally, one realizes the same meditation as the direct apprehension of body without any additional thought or consideration, i.e., without content. In this state, one experiences dispassion.

The same methodology is applied to the body, feelings, mind, and mind objects through a series of twenty-one practices. This is an example of the graduated path, by which one cultivates the qualities of enlightenment individually in the same manner in which one might build a house.

The final exercise in this path is the Fourth Jhana, which is a state of mindful equanimity characterized by indifference toward feelings of pleasure/pain, gladness/sadness, and all similar emotional dichotomies. This state is identified with dispassion and emancipation itself.

Thus, this sequence of tasks lays bare the whole structure of the Buddhist path as understood by the anonymous redactors of the Mahasatipatthana Sutta.

II. PRAXIS

Mindfulness of the Breathing

The first group of practices is called contemplation of the body, and the first exercise in this group is called mindfulness of breathing. This exercise is frequently mentioned in the Pali Canon and has a big reputation. The Buddha referred to it as "the Tathagata's dwelling," and practised it himself, even after his enlightenment experience. The Buddha said that the practice of mindfulness of the breathing is sufficient by itself to carry the aspirant all the way to emancipation, which raises the question of why the Buddha taught 84,000 meditative techniques, including the twenty-one highlighted in this sutta. The traditional answer is that different techniques are suited to different types of people, based on their personal needs and where they are on the path, i.e., their karma. For example, not all techniques lead to the highest goal. Thus, metta meditation in itself only leads to rebirth in the Brahma realm. However, the fact that one

technique alone is sufficient for enlightenment qualifies our understanding of the gradual path, which includes the notion that a sequence of yogas must be mastered before advanced practice can even begin (e.g., the Tibetan approach). While such a hierarchical structure may have value for some people, it is going too far to say that it is mandatory. At best, one might say that progressive practices are valuable and effective for some people. Others may pursue a single essential practice with equal efficacy.

The first step in the first practice is to enter into a state of seclusion, whether in the forest, at the foot of a tree, or in an empty place. Second, one sits down cross-legged, in the archetypal yoga posture that goes back to Indus Valley Civilization (2600–1900 BCE). One holds the body erect, and "establishes mindfulness before him." Walshe suggests that this means focusing the attention on the breath, long associated with the vital principle of life, energy, and creativity in many primordial traditions (e.g., Sanskrit prana). Thus, "mindfully he breathes in, mindfully he breathes out." Without restraining or interfering with the breathing in any way, he observes the length of the breaths as he breathes in and out, whether long or short. To this awareness, he adds awareness of the whole body, calming the whole bodily process. This is the practice of mindfulness of the breathing.

The Four Postures

The second exercise applies the principle of mindfulness of the body to the activities of walking, standing, sitting, and lying down. This may be the origin of the famous walking meditation.

Clear Awareness

The third exercise, Clear Awareness, extends this principle of mindfulness to going or looking forward or back, bending, stretching, carrying objects, eating, drinking, chewing, savouring, defecating, urinating, walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, speaking, and staying silent. Clear Awareness appears to be a development of the Four Postures, both in terms of range of activities and in terms of intensity. For example, Walshe uses the word "know" in the Four Postures, whereas in Clear Awareness he uses the phrase "clearly aware of what he is doing" (sampajanakarihoti).

Reflection on the Parts of the Body

The reflection on the parts of the body consists of an incisive and exacting self-analysis. In other suttas, the cultivation of revulsion towards the body is recommended. It may however be argued that revulsion or repulsion is simply another form of attachment (active dislike as distinct from indifference), in which case this exercise would have to be regarded as compensatory and intermediary rather than cultivating a final goal or state.[82]

The Four Elements

This exercise continues the foregoing by analyzing the body in terms of its elemental states – extension, cohesion, temperature, motion (distension), corresponding to earth, water, fire, and air. A more intuitive interpretation might be to regard the body as consisting of solids, liquids, heat, and breath.

The Nine Charnel Ground Contemplations

Finally, in the context of the contemplations of the body, the nine charnel ground contemplations refer to the progressive contemplation of corpses in various states of decay, ranging from a few days dead to the bones rotted away to powder, and all the intermediate states of decay that one can imagine. In contemplating the corpses in these states, one reflects on and realizes the fact that there is no essential difference between one's own body and fate and the bodies and fates that one observes. The presumed goal of this practice is the development of revulsion towards the body, culminating in indifference.

Contemplation of Feelings

The second contemplation is directed toward the feelings, in the exact Jungian sense of "sensations" of pleasure, pain, or neutral. Here he simply identifies continuously a feeling as pleasure, painful, or neutral and as sensual or non-sensual.

[82] Cf. Nyanaponika and Hecker, *Great Disciples of the Buddha*, 28.

Contemplation of Mind

This practice is very similar to the previous one on feelings, except that here one cultivates awareness of mental states, including lust, hatred (including therefore what we would call emotions apparently), delusion, contraction, distraction, developed, surpassed, concentrated, and liberated or their opposites. The sequence of states seems to be progressive.

Contemplation of Mind-Objects

Buddhism considers the mind to be a sense, exactly as the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body are. Each sense has its correlative objects, which are all equally real (in the conventional sense). Accepting that the mind is a sixth sense, rather than merely an epiphenomenon of the other five, the mind must also have its own correlative objects, which are as real as what we call matter is. These are the dhammas, phenomena as they are. Today we might call this philosophy patternism.

Thus, each sense is threefold, consisting of the internal or subjective aspect (which is merely a thought and has no more reality than a mirage), the external or objective aspect (the object itself, as we would say), and the phenomenological moment that joins the two like glue and constitutes experience.

The Buddha prescribes five exercises for contemplation of mind-objects: the five hindrances, the five aggregates, the six internal and the six external sense bases, the seven factors of enlightenment, and the four noble truths. All of these refer to psychic facts – laws, if you like – that constitute the metaphysical fabric of experience and are the primary object of dharma, just as physical laws, the laws of nature, so-called, constitute the experiential fabric of metaphysics and are the primary object of science.

Practising mindfulness of the hindrances educates one to ignore the emotions of sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, worry and flurry, and doubt that hinder one from attaining emancipation. Ignored, they disappear, because they are created by the mind. The meditator cultivates awareness of each hindrance, e.g., sensual desire. One discerns whether or not it is present in oneself, its arising and vanishing, and how to abandon attachment to the hindrance that in turn results in its ceasing to

come about in the future. In other words, one interrupts the karmic causal sequence by consciously interrupting the flow.

The practice of the five aggregates similarly cultivates awareness of the arising and vanishing of the aggregates that are the objects of grasping, craving, or desirous attachment. These are forms, feelings, perceptions, mental formations (sankharakhandha), and consciousness. The mental formations are of course the factors that underlie karma, including volition (cetana) or intention.

I have already explained the threefold character of the senses in Buddhism. The practice of the six internal and external sense bases is simply the cultivation of awareness of this structure, especially the significance of the phenomenological moment in which subjectivity and objectivity are joined. The text refers to ten fetters that arise in connection with this "joining," viz., sensuality, resentment, pride, wrong views, doubt, desire for becoming, attachment to rites and rituals, jealousy, avarice, and ignorance. Ditthi, 'wrong views' can also mean 'dogma.' Having identified each fetter as it arises in the space between subjectivity and objectivity, one abandons it.

Having abandoned the fetters of the senses, the aggregates of grasping, and the five hindrances, the practitioner learns to identify and cultivate the seven factors of enlightenment through self-observation. Thus, he observes the presence, absence, arising, and development of mindfulness, investigation of states, energy, delight, tranquility, concentration, equanimity. "Energy" is Pali viriya, lit. 'manliness,' same root as virile and virtue. The oldest known representation of the cross-legged posture by what appears to be a shaman or yogi also exhibits an erect phallus. Similarly, the word 'jhana' can be translated as 'ecstasy.' The first three jhanas are characterized as states of delight, pleasure, or happiness. Nirvana itself is clearly an ecstatic state. Viriya also refers to Right Effort, the sixth limb of the Noble Eightfold Path and the first of the final three limbs that designate the end of the path.

Finally, the exercises of the Mahasatipatthana Sutta conclude with the application of the Four Noble Truths to experience: this is suffering, this is the cause of suffering, this is the cessation of suffering, and this is the cause of the cessation of suffering. The Buddha describes the various kinds of suffering, including birth, ageing, death, sorrow, lamentation, pain and

sadness, distress, being attached to the unloved, being separated from the loved, and not getting what one wants.

Given so much suffering, it is not surprising that one might not wish to be born ever again, but, the text informs us, "this cannot be gained by wishing."

Craving can only be extinguished by dispassion, not by desire directed to existence or non-existence. This text refutes the widely held but mistaken notion that the Buddha advocated the pursuit of non-existence.

Escape becomes possible through the realization of the universal fact of transitoriness, consciousness of which has been cultivated by the foregoing practices on mindfulness of the arising and non-arising of phenomena. Since everything is transitory, the experience of samsaric bondage itself must be transitory.

The Origin of Craving

The Buddha identifies how the craving that leads to rebirth arises and establishes itself wherever there is anything agreeable and pleasurable, including the senses, sensory consciousness, sensory contact, feeling, perception, volition, craving itself, thinking, and pondering. Including craving in the list of the causes of craving indicates a profound awareness of what today we would call a "feedback loop." The peculiar intensification of craving is due to the way in which craving takes itself as its own fuel.

The cessation of suffering arises in the abandonment (not repression, note) of craving, resulting in dispassion. The Buddha reviews the list of places where craving establishes itself, this time in relation to cessation, the opposite of craving.

The Noble Eightfold Path

The Noble Truth of the Way of Practice Leading to the Cessation of Suffering is, of course, the Noble Eightfold Path. The Noble Eightfold Path consists of View, Thought, Speech, Action, Livelihood, Effort, Mindfulness, and Concentration, or Wisdom, Morality, and Meditation. In this sutta, View is equated with the Four Noble Truths just discussed. Thought is equated with renunciation. Speech is equated with the Fourth Precept of Pansil. Action summarizes the first three precepts, whereas once again we see that the Fifth Precept, prohibiting alcohol, is absent here as it frequently is in the Pali Canon. The inclusion of Livelihood in

the Noble Eightfold Path is very interesting, since monastics are forbidden from carrying on a livelihood because of receiving alms. The only possible interpretation is that the path is accessible to householders, whereas the livelihood of the monastic may be non-livelihood. Since the Buddha says that nirvana is only present where the Noble Eightfold Path is present, and vice versa, this is an extraordinarily significant fact. Some might argue that the three stages of meditative practice are above livelihood, and therefore restricted to monastics, but the fact that some householders attain emancipation in the Pali Canon argues against this, as does the Buddha's preaching against the "closed fist." However, I have mentioned elsewhere how the evidence of the stories of the Pali Canon themselves, taken as a whole, without necessarily implying that any of the stories is historically factual, is that householders were very involved with the sangha and were able to aspire in their own right and even attain emancipation, at which time they would conventionally enter the sangha. Therefore, we really need to get past the notion, prevalent in some sects of religious Buddhism, which assigns a secondary or inferior status to the householders, and an exaggerated status to the male monastics, many of whom were and are still puthujjana monastics. There are also Buddhist schools that do not do this. This view of householders may be compared to the view of women, another group that is virtually excluded by certain Buddhist groups but not by the Buddha himself.

Right Effort is vayama in Pali, the mental factor behind which is viriya, which we have already encountered as the third of the seven factors of enlightenment, generally translated as 'energy.' Right Effort refers to striving and will. Right Mindfulness is identified with the Four Attentions that we have discussed – body, feeling, mind, mind-objects. Finally, Right Concentration is identified with the Four Jhanas, the process of the progressive refinement of consciousness that we have also discussed elsewhere. The First Jhana is produced by the cultivation of detachment. The Second Jhana is produced by the cultivation of concentration. The Third Jhana comes about because of the fading away of delight. The Fourth Jhana is brought about by the abandonment of pleasure and pain, the two characteristics of feeling. Thus, by abandoning feeling, one attains Right Concentration and the Cessation of Suffering.

Here we see the incredible cohesion of early Buddhist thinking. The Buddhadharma is not merely a haphazard collection of lists. Rather, it is a

profoundly coherent philosophy that implies an original philosopher, the Buddha, which was then carried forward by his immediate disciples much as Plato carried forward the ideas of Socrates.

III. SEVEN DAYS TO EMANCIPATION

In conclusion, the Buddha explores the relationship between meditation, emancipation, and time (samsara), and declares that if one were to practice the exercises of the Mahasatipatthana Sutta for 7 years, one will definitely attain either the state of an arhant or the state of a non-returner. Here we see very clearly that the sutta is a kind of manual for monastics and meditators. We have discussed these states before of course. The arhant has attained final release from the process of rebirth, i.e., time itself, and has attained the non-temporal, trans-dual, immortal deathless state to which the Buddha frequently alludes. The Buddha himself is the highest type of arhant, thus introducing the concept of "types of arhant," just as there are types of Buddhas. The non-returner will never again be reborn as a human being, but is born in the Five Pure Abodes, the five highest planes of the Rupaloka from which he will attain arhantship in the future, after he completely purifies himself.

It would, however, be a mistake to read the reference to "seven years" as the time required to complete the twenty-one meditations of the Mahasatipatthana Sutta, which would work out to 4 months per practice, although it is easy to misread the text in this way. It is, rather, the maximum time. For then the Buddha says that if one were to practice for 6 years one's attainment of the state of an arhant or a non-returner is guaranteed. But then he says, wait, even 6 years is enough time to attain one of these two states. He continues in this vein, whittling the required time down to 4 years, 3 years, 2 years, 1 year. That means that each exercise can only take 17 days. Perhaps 17 days is long enough were one to meditate all day. But wait, the Buddha is still counting: 7 months (note the adhesion to the symbolic number "7," whereas one might have expected him to start at 12 months). The Buddha then mentions 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 month and half a month. Twenty-one practices in a month is only one practice a day. Maybe even that is doable by a monastic or on a retreat. But the Buddha hasn't stopped counting: "whoever should practice these four foundations of mindfulness for just one week may expect one of two results: either Arahantship in this life or, if there should be some substrate left, the state

of a Non-returner." This statement parallels other suttas in which the Buddha says that 1 week (or even 5 days) of practice is sufficient to attain emancipation.

Note the threefold repetition of the number 7: 7 years, 7 months, 7 days. Interestingly, the sum of three sevens is 21, the number of exercises described in the Mahasatipatthana Sutta. The number appears in the sutta as the number of the factors of enlightenment. In the Cabalistic tradition, 777 is the number of salvation. The significance of the number 7 is widespread in Buddhism. For example, 7 × 7 is 49, the number of days one remains in the bardo before being reborn.

The literal meaning of this passage, then, is that by the practice of the four foundations of mindfulness, elaborated in the twenty-one practices of the Mahasatipatthana Sutta, one will achieve either emancipation or arhantship after between 7 days and 7 years of practice, depending on the amount of "substrate left."

The first thing we would note about this passage is the minimum time in relation to the number of exercises. Assuming one slept 6 hours per day, in 7 days one would be able to practice 126 hours at most, allowing just 6 hours per exercise. This seems impossible. The nine charnel ground meditations alone could not be completed in less than a year. Therefore, the twenty-one practices must be regarded as adjuvants or aids to the main practice, the cultivation of the four attentions themselves. However, underlying the cultivation of the four attentions is the practice of mindfulness itself. Presumably, this is the essential practice to which the Buddha refers when he says that practising the four foundations of mindfulness can lead to arhantship or the state of a non-returner in as short a time as 7 days, which is implicit in all of the practices yet identical with none of them. You will remember that in the beginning the Buddha alludes to the "one way." I propose then that this phrase has a double meaning: i.e., the singular or essential practice or technique that includes all other practices and techniques, and the key to the nature of this practice itself, which is "oneness' – self-unification, self-integration, concentration, "one-pointedness," "at-one-ment," etc. The practices in this manual of meditation combine the essential technique of attentiveness with the cultivation of wisdom, especially the realization of the nature of the body, feelings, mind, the hindrances, aggregates, senses,

enlightenment, the four noble truths, and mindfulness itself, in a progression that culminates in emancipation.

The period of 1 week also seems very short until we consider two facts: first, the qualification that one may achieve either the state of an arhant or the state of a non-returner, thus enlarging the field significantly, and, second, the reference to a "substrate." Nanamoli and Bodhi's translation of the Majjhima Nikaya version of this sutta use the phrase "trace of clinging." The Pali word is upadi. The dictionary meaning of this word is the 'fuel of life.' PED has 'stuff of life, substratum of being, khandha (the khandhas are the five sensorial aggregates – forms, sensations, perceptions, mental formations, consciousness, which constitute the basis of craving).

The implication is that the "fuel of life" is exhausted by meditation on mindfulness, in which renunciation and the absence of arising of any new craving causes the existing fires of karma to burn themselves out. I am reminded of a metaphor used by both Padmasambhava and Aleister Crowley, of the master being consumed in the intensity of his attainment, leaving only a residue of ash that is then blown away by the winds of prana.

This implies in return that the state of mindfulness is not the same as complete emancipation, but that one who accomplishes mindfulness must attain final emancipation within seven rebirths. Mindfulness appears as a discrete accomplishment in its own right. Otherwise, it makes no sense to refer to a period of time during which a substrate is "left." Meditation "burns" karma, but how long it takes depends on the quality and quantity of karma. Of course, the accomplishment of mindfulness might simply be mindfulness itself, so that the reference is to the beginning of practice. In this case, 7 days is indeed a short time but would presumably only apply to saints. Here we face a paradox, however, because a saint by definition is a person who is already well advanced in the practice of mindfulness. These are they to whom Sahampati referred when he implored the Buddha to teach for the sake of those whose eyes are covered with only a thin coating of dust.

Thus the suttas refer to a nirvana and a parinirvana, only the second of which constitutes "final emancipation." In Gotama's case, the substrate contained enough karmic "fuel" to sustain his life for another 80 years. For others this period may be extended to seven rebirths. But no one can

attain in less than 7 days, which is the period that the Buddha remained in continuous ecstasy after his enlightenment.

The Buddha concludes, "There is, monks, this one way to the purification of beings, for the overcoming of sorrow and distress, for the disappearance of pain and sadness, for the gaining of the right path, for the realization of Nirvana – that is to say the four foundations of mindfulness, and it is for this reason that it was said."

15
Final Teachings of the Buddha

The Mahaparinirvana Sutta is interesting because it is the oldest and longest biographical account of the Buddha, located in the Digha Nikaya, including his final teachings.

Almost forty fundamental spiritual principles are embedded in the narrative but are easily overlooked if one focuses on the biography.

Thus, the Mahaparinirvana Sutta constitutes one of the most important foundational documents of historical Buddhism.

FIRST RECITATION SECTION

Principle #1: Tathagatas Cannot Lie (1.2)

King Ajatasattu of Magadha uses the Buddha as an oracle because Tathagatas, having achieved self-perfection, are both internally and externally completely self-consistent, as reality must be. This passage highlights the paradox of the coexistence of the corrupt nature of northeast India during the 5th century BCE and a deep belief in spirituality.

Principle #2: Political Philosophy of the Buddha (1.4)

The Buddha sets out a comprehensive political philosophy, thus showing that even a transcendent being continues to care for the inhabitants of the world of samsara. Indeed, the proper political organization of society is a recurring theme of the Pali Canon. These principles include holding assemblies, peace, following the ancient tradition, seniority, women's rights, a national spiritual practice, and a

national spiritual organization. These precepts follow the organizational principles of the quasi-democratic Vajjian republic, which were also similar to the principles of the Shakyan republic of the Buddha's family.

Principle #3: Precepts for the Sangha (1.6)

The precepts for the monastics also parallel those of the Vajjians, and includes holding assemblies, peace, rules of training (replacing an ancient tradition), respect for seniority, detachment (replacing women's rights), forest dwelling (replacing a national spiritual practice), and mindfulness (replacing a national spiritual organization).

Principle #4: Property (1.11)

The sangha is to be organized based on commonality of property, but does not supersede civil society, which supports the sangha so that the sangha benefits from civil acceptance. Interestingly, the fourth continent of Sumeru, Uttarakuru, which is the home of the longest-lived and most advanced race of human beings, with longevity of 1,000 years, is communistic. Presumably this will be the social system of Shambhala when, according to the Kalachakra, it manifests in the 25th century of the Common Era.

Principle #5: Wisdom is the Salvific Principle (1.12)

A recurring theme that runs through the Mahaparinirvana Sutta, almost like a refrain, is the mutual relationship between morality, ethics, or virtue; one-pointedness, concentration, or meditation; and wisdom. This is called the threefold training or the threefold partition, and is not attributed to the Buddha, but to the nun Dhammadinna (in the Culavedalla Sutta), who the Buddha declared to be the nun foremost in wisdom. In many sects of religious Buddhism today this threefold division of the Noble Eightfold Path has virtually replaced the Noble Eightfold Path. The path is presented as beginning with the cultivation of virtue, followed by meditation. Because of these two things, wisdom, identified with enlightenment, dawns. The Buddha states that meditation, imbued with morality, brings great fruit and profit, and that wisdom, imbued with meditation, brings great fruit and profit, but that it is the mind imbued with wisdom that brings about emancipation. Thus, the sequence is morality (since meditation cannot be imbued with something that it does

not have), meditation, and wisdom. Note, however, the subtle distinction made here between morality and meditation on the one hand and wisdom on the other. Morality and meditation are skilful means (upaya), but it is the mind-imbued wisdom that brings about emancipation. From this, we conclude that it is wisdom that is the essential salvific principle, which brings the threefold partition into conformity with the Noble Eightfold Path, the first limb of which is Right View (or Wisdom) that leads the aspirant to the attainment of the first crucial stage of the stream enterer. It seems, then, that the true sequence of the path is wisdom, morality, meditation. Moreover, wisdom is not merely something that is attained. It is also something that is developed. This view is confirmed in the doctrine of dependent co-origination (pattiyasamuppada), the radical or first principle of which, ignorance (avijja), is overcome by wisdom. Wisdom is also the essential attainment of a buddha, whereas ethics and meditation, leading to the state of desirelessness or non-attachment, is the essential attainment of an arhant. If one reads the Pali Canon in its entirely, it becomes clear that it is the realization of wisdom that brings about emancipation, while ethics is deemphasized. There are many stories of aspirants attaining emancipation simply by listening to a dharma talk of the Buddha or another disciple of the Buddha, followed by a period of meditation as short as five days. Similarly, the Buddha himself says that emancipation is available after a period of meditation as short as 5 or 7 days.

Principle #6: Sariputta and the Buddha Debate the Greatness of the Buddha (1.16)

Sariputta, renowned among the foremost disciples of the Buddha for his wisdom, affirms to the Buddha that the Buddha is the best and most enlightened ascetic or brahman, past, present, or future. Rather than accept this praise, the Buddha turns it against the Sariputta, first chidingly affirming him – "You have spoken with a bull's voice, Sariputta, you have roared the lion's roar of certainty" – and then questioning him – "Have all the Arhant Buddhas of the past appeared to you, and were the minds of all those Lords open to you? Have you perceived all the Arhant Buddhas who will appear in the future? Do you even know me as the Arhant Buddha?" To all of these questions Sariputta was forced to acknowledge that he did not know. Thus, the Buddha ironically concludes, "You have

spoken with a bull's voice, Sariputta; you have roared the lion's roar of certainty." Such is my reading of this text, which might be read by a religious as an affirmation of Sariputta's faith, were it not for the emphasis the Buddha placed on questioning and Sariputta's defensive reply. Rather, the Buddha challenges Sariputta to justify his claim. Sariputta's reputation for wisdom was not misplaced, for he turned the tables on the Buddha, and proved to the Buddha that his respect for the Buddha was not based on faith or clairvoyance, but on his knowledge of the "drift of the dharma" (dhammavaya). This recurs to the Buddha's statement that, although we may not know the dharma, we can judge the dharma by its effect – true dharma always yields positive karma; something that has negative karma cannot be true dharma, reminiscent of the statement by Jesus that one can judge a tree by its fruits. One must be careful, here, of course, not to conflate real and apparent positiveness. Positiveness does not necessarily "feel good," whereas something that does not "feel good" is not automatically negative. The Buddha has no response, thus acceding to the wisdom of Sariputta's reply.

Principle #7: Comprehensive Dharma versus Dharma in Brief (1.18)

If you read the Pali Canon, comprehensive dharma is often contrasted with dharma in brief or "in short" (samkhittena). As Peter Masefield, author of *Divine Revelation in the Pali Canon,* points out, the distinction is obscure, since the content of comprehensive dharma and dharma in brief often appears to be similar.[83] Dharma in brief is frequently requested before an aspirant would go into the forest for a period of intensive meditation, often culminating in arhantship. It seems like it might be similar to an oral transmission or empowerment, as in the Tantric traditions.

Principle #8: The Motif of the Pillar or Pole (1.22)

The Pali Canon frequently presents the Buddha as sitting with his back against a pole or pillar. The monks sit behind the Buddha, facing the lay followers, who sit in the east facing the Buddha. Thus, to the sangha the Buddha appears in the place of the rising sun, and to the lay followers in the place of the setting sun, foremost of the sangha, with the sangha as

[83] Masefield, op. cit., 101f.

support. The motif of the pole or pillar is of course an allusion to the tree of awakening (the Bodhi tree, ficus religiosa), sitting under which the Buddha attained enlightenment. The Buddha also experienced his first meditative state while sitting as a child under a rose apple tree, and passed between two sal trees (shorea robusta), while lying on the ground **in** accordance with Indian custom. He was also born under a sal tree.[84] Similarly, the Buddha enjoined his disciples to live in the forest as a place of refuge. India has a long history of sacred trees and forests, along with many other societies. When the Buddha broke his vow of abstinence when he was on the verge of dying, he was seated under a tree, and Sujata, who offered him a bowl of rice gruel, believed he was the spirit of the tree to which she had come to make a food offering. The sacred tree is representative of the polar axis, like Mount Sumeru, through which communication with the divine worlds becomes possible. The pillars of Ashoka recur to this symbolism also, all of which represent the axis mundi – the cosmic axis, world axis, world pillar, columna cerului, centre of the world, or world tree, the omphalos (navel) of the world, and is a universal motif of the philosophia perennis with its origins in prehistoric shamanism.

Principle #9: The Path of the Householder (1.24)

Buddhism is not merely a spirituality of monastics, ascetics, and recluses. The Buddha had many disciples who were householders, and some of these disciples attained arhantship. Thus, the Buddhist science of spirituality also includes the path of the householder. The path of the

[84] According to the Jataka, Queen Maya travelled from King Suddhodana's estate in Kapilavastu to her parent's place in Devadaha "when she was far gone in pregnancy." This is still the custom in Nepal (personal communication). The texts report that when she gave birth at Lumbini in the heat of the day, the sal trees bloomed. Perhaps she was overcome by the exertion of the trip and, merely a day away from her family's home, gave birth to the Buddha in Lumbini Grove. The Jatakas also state that the Buddha was conceived during the Full Moon of the eighth lunar month (June–July), under the constellation of uttarasalha. Thus, the "due date" of the Buddha's birth was March–April. According to Omesh Bajpai, "The formation of flower buds starts in the month of March which converted into matured flowers in April" (Bajpai et al., 8: 66-72). In fact, in Japan the Buddha's birthday is celebrated on April 8 (Hana-Matsuri). (The Japanese commemorate the enlightenment and death of the Buddha on December 8 and February 8 respectively, the latter also corresponding very well to this view.). However, it is quite certain from the foregoing that the Buddha was not born on the Full Moon day of May.

householder is based primarily, but not exclusively, on the path of karma, i.e., removing negative karma through self-purification and acquiring merit through the cultivation of positive karma. Thus, Buddhism is not divorced from practical life, and reveals itself as a pragmatic spiritual philosophy. This is shown by the Buddha's summary of the perils and advantages of good and bad morality, which he designates failure and success in morality. The advantages of success in good morality, i.e., good karma, include wealth, reputation, confidence and assurance, dying unconfused, and rebirth in a divine world. It is clear from this and other passages that although the sangha was organized in a communitarian and, indeed, communistic way, the Buddha did not advocate the extension of that system of social organization to civil society as a whole. The Buddha did not oppose property and wealth in civil society, for example, although it is clear from other passages that he saw wealth as imposing special social obligations on the wealthy, and that he advocated social redistribution of property and wealth for the general good as well as personal financial responsibility. In fact, taking the Pali Canon as a whole, his view is remarkably modern.

Principle #10: Interaction Between Devas and People (1.26, 3.50, 6.11)

The word "deva" is usually translated as "god," but this is really a very unsatisfactory translation. The English word means "that which is called or invoked," whereas the Sanskrit/Pali word means "shining," referring to a celestial being of light, rather like Plato's bisexual flying spheres. According to the PED, devas are splendid, mobile, beautiful, good, and luminous, as well as continuous with the life of humanity and all beings. They are beings who occupy higher worlds in the system of vertical extension that defines samsara, but it is clear from this passage that some devas also coexist with humanity. Interestingly, Patna or Pataligama is one of the oldest continuously inhabited places on earth and the largest city in the world between 300 and 195 BCE. About 300 BCE, a hundred years after the death of the Buddha, its population was 400,000. One can see from the text, thousands of devas invisibly inhabited this city, influencing the minds of people telepathically. This is the only place I know of where this aspect of the life of devas and people is documented. This passage is interesting because it implies several things. First, that the Buddha's

dharma is not directed at humans only, but that it is also directed at spiritual beings (devas).

The Buddha himself claimed to be aware of such devas and to have received teachings (dharma) from them. We know from the thirty-one planes of existence that at least three deva realms have intercourse with human beings, including the Four Great Kings, Thirty-Three Gods, and Brahma realms, and that the asuras ('anti-gods') appear to occupy the same plane as humans, viz., the one world ocean. Here we encounter another interesting bit of lore with regard to the devas, for Ananda asks Anuruddha, a cousin of the Buddha and one of the five principal disciples, which devas he is aware of. Anuruddha was ranked as one of the foremost in the attainment of the divine eye (dibba-cakkhu). Anuruddha refers to sky devas whose minds are earthbound and earth devas whose minds are earthbound in contrast to devas who are free from craving. The last category implies that devas are capable of practising dharma and of attainment, something that is implied throughout the Pali Canon despite the dogma that one often hears that only human beings are capable of emancipation. The asuras of course are another example of earthbound devas, having been cast down from the realm of the Thirty-Three Gods due to their association with samsara and the powers of nature. The earth devas may refer to the Four Great Kings, the realm of what we refer to when we refer to the sprites, tree spirits, elves, fairies, pixies, gnomes, Japanese yokai, the Spanish and Latin-American duende, and various Slavic fairies, and other similar beings of all times and climes.

Principle #11: The Divine Eye (1.27)

The "divine eye" (dibba-cakkhu) is referred to frequently throughout the Pali Canon. In the Pali Canon, this is one of the six gnoses (chalabhinna). In this context, it refers to knowing the karmic destinations of others. However, it has a larger meaning as well. It is enumerated as one of the three wisdoms (tevijja or tivijja), along with remembering past lives and the extinction of mental intoxicants. In the Maha-Saccaka Sutta, the Buddha says he obtained the divine eye during the second watch of the night of his enlightenment. In the Mahaparinirvana Sutta, it is by means of the divine eye that the Buddha sees devas. The divine eye is also a universal symbolic motif or archetype. In the Western esoteric tradition, the divine eye is linked to the concept of "inner vision" or clairvoyance,

where practitioners claim the ability to perceive spiritual realms or hidden truths. The Eye of Horus has been incorporated into this system as a symbol of protection, healing, and insight into the deeper nature of reality. It also appears in Freemasonry, where a semi-circular glory appears below the eye, which is enclosed in a triangle. In Christianity, it represents the Eye of Providence, where clouds or sunbursts surround it. The Eye of Providence appears on the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of the French Revolution. Beyond its specific representations in Freemasonry or Christianity, the "all-seeing eye" is a broader symbol of divine omniscience, appearing in various cultures as a symbol of protection, insight, and higher knowledge. The idea of a cosmic eye that watches over creation can be found in many religious systems, symbolizing the transcendent awareness of the universe itself.

The eye is also a prominent symbol in Hinduism, where Lord Shiva is often depicted with a third eye, representing destruction and transformation. This third eye is said to have the power to burn away illusion and ego, leading to a higher state of consciousness. In the Indian chakra system, the eye appears as the ajna chakra, the eye of intuition and intellect, located in the centre of the forehead. In Tibetan Buddhism, the “third eye” is the upper end of the central energy channel that runs up through the spine to the top of the head. Odin, the chief god of the Norse pantheon, sacrifices one of his eyes at Mímir's well in exchange for wisdom. This emphasizes the eye as a symbol of knowledge, especially divine or hidden knowledge that comes with a personal cost. This centre is also important in Qigong, Sufism, and Cabala. In human beings, the divine eye corresponds to the pineal gland, in the centre of the brain, a vestigial third eye that actually appears in lizards, amphibians, and fish. Descartes called this organ “the seat of the soul.” Modern research has discovered that the pineal gland is the source of naturally occurring dimethyltryptamine (DMT), the most powerful psychedelic known, which is also widely found throughout nature. DMT facilitates vivid otherworldly visions including encounters with non-human entities with which one can communicate. Modern neuroscience connects the gland to circadian rhythms via the secretion of melatonin, linking the gland to altered states of consciousness, meditation, and even psychedelic experiences like those produced by DMT.

Principle #12: The Buddha Was Not an Extreme Ascetic (1.30)

Although it is well-known that the Buddha rejected the extreme asceticism of the proto-Shaivite samanas with whom he associated prior to his enlightenment, the Buddha is still regarded as a moderate ascetic, illustrated for example by the rigid rules of the Vinaya. Nevertheless, it is clear from the Pali Canon that the Buddha's life, while simple, was not entirely deprived. There are numerous examples in the Pali Canon in which the Buddha and his entourage are invited to the home of a wealthy local person, usually either political figures or celebrities, to be entertained with a fine meal of choice hard and soft food, which they invariably ate to their satisfaction. Since the Buddha travelled extensively, this must have occurred fairly frequently. This fact stands as a useful corrective to the extreme view that the Buddha was exclusively ascetic.

Principle #13: Evidence of Proto-Tantra (1.33)

Although the Pali Canon is largely naturalistic, it does attest to the reality of psychic powers, and sometimes these appear as full-blown miracles, as in the story of the Buddha and his entourage teleporting themselves from one side of the Ganges to the other. This is especially ironic in view of the disparagement of miracles by the Buddha in About Patikaputta (Patikaputta Sutta, 1.4). Similarly, Jesus disparages those who seek for a sign, declaring that no sign will be given to them, yet the Gospels and the Church ascribe miracles to him as the proof of his divinity. The Buddha clearly saw that the belief in miracles leads to a superstitious reverence for the person rather than the one true miracle, the miracle of the dharma itself, which alone leads to emancipation. Therefore, I believe we can reliably state that the Buddha did not perform miracles and that these stories are later inventions. Nevertheless, the presence of miracles of this type in the Pali Canon is another indication of the development of proto-Tantric literary motifs even in the early developmental period of Buddhism, much as Gnosticism appeared early in the development of the Christian tradition. One can, of course, derive valid teachings from such stories even if they are not literally or historically true.

SECOND RECITATION SECTION

Principle #14: The Mirror of Dharma (2.8)

The Mirror of Dharma gives a method whereby the aspirant can realize for themselves the state of stream entry, whereby they realize the fact that they will achieve emancipation within no more than seven lives. The method is to cultivate absolute confidence in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. This method must be differentiated from Christian faith, however, which is virtually defined as belief not based on proof, whereas the Buddha states that the "unwavering confidence" to which he refers is based on "inspection, leading onward, to be comprehended by the wise each one for himself." Moreover, the morality of such an aspirant must be integral. By this method, one can know by oneself as a matter of certainty that one has achieved stream-entry.

Principle #15: Mindfulness (2.12, 2.13)

The Pali word translated as "mindfulness" is sati. According to the PED, the etymological meaning of this word is "memory, to remember," also: "recognition, consciousness, intentness of mind, wakefulness of mind, mindfulness, alertness, lucidity of mind, self-possession, conscience, self-consciousness." The latter is somewhat disconcerting, given the Buddha's rejection of the atta (atman) theory, commonly identified with the self. Mindfulness is probably also connected with the recollection of past lives, which is strongly emphasized throughout the Pali Canon. Mindfulness begins with mindfulness of the body, and is then extended to feelings, mind, and mind-objects.

Principle #16: A Prostitute Entertains the Buddha (2.14)

As we have seen, although the Buddha clearly lived a very modest and simple life, it was not without its luxuries, in the form of the choicest hard and soft food when prominent people in various communities entertained him and his monastics. It is also clear that the Buddha interacted with and taught women without distinction. A striking confirmation of both of these observations is the Buddha's interaction with Ambapali, a wealthy ganika who lived in the Licchavi city of Vesali, part of the Vajjian confederacy. Although Walshe renders the Pali word ganika by "courtesan," comparing her to the Japanese tradition of the geisha, the PED simply renders the word as "harlot," "one who belongs to the crowd,"

i.e., a common woman or, perhaps, a promiscuous woman. Nonetheless, Ambapali was a wealthy and beautiful woman who was a nagavradu, a royal courtesan who was also a prominent citizen of the town. The Buddha stayed in her mango grove, taught her the dharma, and went to her home for his morning meal, accompanied by his monastics. So much for the Vinaya rule against consorting with women, and a prostitute at that. Clearly, the Buddha was neither a fundamentalist nor a prude. He consorted with women, taught them the dharma on an equal basis with men, and was not above enjoying a fine meal or the company of a beautiful courtesan. Ambapali made a gift of her mango grove to the sangha, which the Buddha accepted.

Principle #17: Energy, the Force of Life, Health, and Longevity (2.23, 3.40)

Here we encounter the first indication of the Buddha's impending illness, characterized by diarrhea and sharp pains so severe as to suggest dying, about ten months before his death. The monastics remained at Ambapali's park in Vesali, whereas the Buddha spent his last rainy season (July–September) in Beluva, a small town outside the southern gate of Vesali. What is most interesting about this passage, however, is the reference to energy and a "force of life" by which the Buddha was able to overcome his illness and postpone its effects so that he could take his leave of the order of monastics. The Buddha recommends the cultivation of energy throughout the Pali Canon, but only in a few places is it clear that this energy is an iddhi, a psychic power that has intrinsically healing and life-giving effects, comparable in fact to kundalini, which the Buddha may have experienced during his ascetic period. This brings the Buddha's teachings into relation with kundalini yoga, the Tibetan concept of tumo, the Chinese concept of qi, etc.

Principle #18: Inner and Outer Dharma (2.25)

Here and elsewhere the Buddha indicates that his teaching has no "inner" and "outer," that he has no "teacher's fist" in respect of doctrines. This is widely interpreted to mean that Buddhism is exoteric, and that there is no esoteric dharma, no "secret wisdom," such as Vajrayana, Tantra, Theosophy, etc. imply. However, this is not, strictly speaking, what the Buddha says. The Buddha says that he makes no distinction

between inner and outer, teaching everything to everyone openly and without secrecy. Walshe himself recognizes this when he states that there is no contradiction here between this passage and the Simsapa Sutta. In the latter, the Buddha distinguishes between knowledge that leads to liberation and other forms of knowledge, "vast as the leaves in the simsapa forest," that he does not teach. The latter is of the same order as the former, and is realized because of realization. "Even so, bhikshus, much more is the direct knowledge that I have known, but that has not been taught. Few is that which has been taught." The distinction that the Buddha is making appears to be between praxis and gnosis, the latter the goal of the former. Thus, the latter does in effect constitute a secret wisdom, an untaught knowledge that is nonetheless the object of realization. What the Buddha is actually saying here is that he openly teaches the entirety of wisdom, but that he emphasizes the praxis first, because it is through the latter that one realizes the former. In the Simsapa Sutta, the praxis referred to is the Four Noble Truths. Clearly, however, the Buddha taught a great deal more than the Four Noble Truths. This is the only interpretation that reconciles and harmonizes all relevant passages, and shows the importance of not selecting the passages that one likes, but rather referring to and collating all relevant passages in order to arrive at a synthetic interpretation.

Principle #19: The Sangha Has No Leader (2.25)

In this very significant passage, the Buddha makes it clear that he does not want to be succeeded as head of the sangha. In other passages the Buddha disdains being thought of as a "leader," referring to himself rather as a friend amongst friends. Later in the Mahaparinirvana Sutta, the Buddha states that the monastics should take the dharma as their head. Nevertheless, after the Buddha's death the sangha appointed Mahakassapa as its leader at the First Buddhist Council, followed by Ananda. Since the appointment of a leader violated the Buddha's dictum with respect to the organization of the sangha, one may question the legitimacy of the early Buddhist councils, and in fact, their legitimacy did become an issue when the Mahasamghikas – the majority – and the Sthaviras split following the Second Buddhist Council over questions concerning the rules of the Vinaya and the infallibility of the arhants.

Principle #20: The Dharma Is the Only Refuge (2.26)

The monastics are to live freely as individuals, within a cooperative sangha, with themselves and the dharma as their only retreat. Again, the reliance on the self is paradoxical in light of the anatta doctrine. Some scholars believe that the formula of the Triple Jewel, i.e., taking refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha is a later innovation that arose about the time of Ashoka (3rd cent. BCE), and that the original refuge formula referred to the Dharma only. Clearly, the kind of sangha described by the Buddha is very different from the hierarchical, authoritarian sangha that we often see today. Although the Buddha did substitute respect for seniority for egalitarianism after his death, the sangha is still supposed to emphasize independent self-inquiry and free thought and consensus (failing which, majority rule), without excessive attachment to rules, rituals, or beliefs and without a singular leader. Recently, the Dalai Lama, to his credit, has honoured the Buddha's dictum by stepping down as political leader of the Tibetan Administration in Exile and fostering a democratic constitution. In this regard, Buddhism appears to be exceptionally modern.

THIRD RECITATION SECTION

Principle #21: The Four Roads to Power (3.3)

The Four Roads to Power are another example of magical or proto-Tantric thinking in the Pali Canon. This practice is not aimed only at awakening or enlightenment but also the development of psychic powers, in this context, longevity. In Walshe's translation, success in this practice would enable the practitioner to live for a 100 years, close to the maximum longevity of a human being. Specifically, had Ananda taken the hint, he might have asked the Buddha to extend his life by this means and live another 20 years. However, Ananda – who is represented in the suttas as a bit dull – did not take the hint.

The four roads to power (iddhipada) are not explained further in the Mahaparinirvana Sutta, but we know what was involved from Viraddha Sutta.[85] In this sutta, the Buddha states that the practice consists of the development of four qualities: will (chanda), energy (viriya), intention (citta), and investigation (vimamsa), which are in turn based on the

[85] SN 51.2.

cultivation of concentration (samadhi)[86] and concentrated mental aspiration (padhana-sankhara).

[86] Ajahn Brahm suggests that "concentration" is a bad translation of samadhi, for which he prefers the English word "stillness" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-QlSW5KwxI). According to Brahm, samadhi should never be translated by the word "concentration." Samadhi is both a Sanskrit and a Pali word. According to the Spoken Sanskrit dictionary (http://spokensanskrit.de/index.php?page=1), "samadhi" has no less than thirty meanings, including: justification of a statement, aggregate, putting together, intense application or fixing the mind on, set, bringing into harmony, joint or a particular position of the neck, settlement, adjustment, joining with, intense absorption or a kind of trance, sanctuary or tomb of a saint, attention, joining or combining with, whole, accomplishment, trance, conclusion, proof, assent, concentration of mind, intentness, union, concentration of the thoughts, profound or abstract meditation, agreement, intense contemplation of any particular object, setting to rights, completion, deep concentration, meditation. Can it be that a word that is as rich as to have thirty different meanings can never be translated by any word other than "stillness"? The Indo-European root of stillness is *stel, meaning "to put" or "stand" (http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=still&allowed_in_frame=0). If one looks at the different translations of the Sanskrit word, one can pick out several threads of meaning, including ideas of putting together, intense application, and the mind. Interestingly, these three threads of meaning correspond exactly to the three elements of which the word "samadhi" is etymologically constructed: sam + a + dhi. The word prefix sam, root of the English word "sum," means "with, together, completely, absolutely." The central A means "near, toward, up to" (http://www.learnsanskrit.org/start/words/prefixes), implying the vector. Finally, the Sanskrit root dhi is a fundamental Sanskrit root the meanings of which include "understanding, reflection, religious thought, mind, design, intelligence, opinion, meditation, imagination, notion, intellect, speech, thought," and "intellect" as well as "put" or "place" (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dhi_(Hindu_thought)). Going on to Pali, the *Pali-English Dictionary* has "concentration; a concentrated, self-collected, intent state of mind and meditation." Tamilcube (http://dictionary.tamilcube.com/pali-dictionary.aspx), an online *Pali-English Dictionary,* has "composure, concentration, trance, meditation, one-pointedness, agreement, peace, reconciliation, tranquility, self-concentration, calm." If we look again at the etymology, we can see that the essential idea is that of the will putting the whole mind into a state of complete, harmonious, balanced self-awareness by means of intense concentration. We can see here why Brahm thinks that "stillness" is a good translation of samadhi. The technical term for this is hypomotility, as I have discussed in my paper on shamanic techniques for the induction of ecstasy (see http://palisuttas.com/2013/04/18/deconstructing-tantra/). This is one of the primary techniques of all yogic and shamanic practice. Unfortunately, as a universal translation for samadhi, "stillness" does not quite cut it, however, for samadhi is not merely a noun, it is, primarily, a verb. Thus, it is the eighth and highest "limb" of the Noble Eightfold Path, generally translated as Right Concentration. What is the action of "stillness"? The verb "to still" is certainly valid, but what is it that stills? It is the mind, and, in particular, the will, which is the force, power, energy of concentrated intention or attention, the kinetic power of awareness that is the source of enlightenment and illusion, whereby the state of stillness is attained, and this is the primary meaning of samadhi. Stillness is not passive. "Stillness"

Principle #22: The Dharma, the Power of Truth, and Merit (3.7)

We see again a reference in the "dhamma of wondrous effect" to the universal idea that pervades the Pali Canon, especially the Jatakas, of the power of truth or the act of truth. This is a pan-Indian idea that we have discussed before, in which the ultimate truth of things itself exercises an influence that is beneficial and powerful. Mahatma Gandhi utilized the power of truth as a political principle, which he called satyagraha. This is also the principle by which merit may be acquired. The study, teaching, or recitation of dharma is itself held to be intrinsically efficacious and beneficial.

Principle #23: Conscious Dying (3.10)

According to this passage, the Buddha did not die as a matter of accident or involuntarily, he deliberately renounced the life principle, mindfully and with full awareness. One might be inclined to regard this as mythologization, but one would be mistaken. This principle of conscious dying is also found amongst the Tibetan Buddhists, some of whose high lamas are reputedly able intentionally to will themselves to death. This is widely attested. This practice is portrayed in the movie, *Little Buddha*.[87] In Tibetan Buddhism, this practice is called phowa. It is the highest of the Six Yogas of Naropa. Dzogchen meditation is considered the highest and greatest phowa practice.

Principle #24: Two Nirvanas: With and Without Remainder (3.20)

There is not one but two types of nirvana, the final "blowing out" or extinction of desirous attachment: one with and one without "remainder." The arhant who attains nirvana ceases to produce new karma due to the absence of desirous attachment, but existing karma still needs to play itself out. This suggests that karma is not entirely destroyed by nirvana. If all karma were destroyed by nirvana, then one would die immediately. The Buddha appears to teach that the attainment of nirvana destroys much karma, but not all. This view of nirvana also corresponds to the Buddha's life. After he attained enlightenment, the Buddha remained in an altered state of consciousness for a week, after which he returned to normal

is altogether too Chinese to stand as a universal translation of the Indian Buddhist concept of samadhi, but is certainly included in its range of meanings as one essential implication.

[87] Bertolucci.

consciousness. He continued to live, and the evidence of the Pali Canon is that he continued to engage in spiritual practices, including mindfulness of the breath – this behaviour makes no sense if the Buddha were a perfected being. Rather, it implies a being who still needs and benefits from spiritual practice. Finally, the Buddha exhausted his remaining karma and renounced the last vestige of attachment to life. He passed, attaining the state of perfection called parinirvana, "final emancipation," characterized by absolute transcendence.

Principle #25: The Eight Jhanas (3.33)

1. Rapture and happiness born of seclusion.
2. Delight and happiness born of concentration without applied or sustained thought.
3. Quiet, subtle and pervasive happiness, subtle enjoyment of mindful and equanimous mind, without rapture.
4. Stability, stillness, and equanimity, without happiness.
5. Infinite space.
6. Infinite consciousness.
7. Nothing.
8. Neither perception nor non-perception – opening to the non-dual.

Cessation of Feeling and Perception (this level is not attested in all sources, and does not appear to correspond to complete transcendence).

Principle #26: The Buddha's Enlightenment Experience (3.34)

This is a succinct statement of the Buddha's monumental enlightenment experience, the reference to having just attained supreme enlightenment. This appears to be an early statement, there being no reference to the three watches of the night, consisting of the recollection of past lives, karma, and dependent co-origination (pattiyasamuppada), respectively. Then at sunrise, he attained full enlightenment, characterized by the encounter with Mara and the cessation of desirous attachment. Here, however, the Buddha simply attains supreme enlightenment in a moment, suggesting the instantaneous theory of liberation. Here we learn the name of the place, Uruvela, located in the state of Bihar; the river – Neranjara –and the tree – the Goatherd's Banyan

tree. Goat herders, having gone to the shade of the Banyan tree, would sit there, hence the name.

FOURTH RECITATION SECTION

Principle #27: Continuity of Authentic Dharma (4.8)

After the death of the Buddha, the Buddha's dialogues were remembered and recited by the sangha, especially by Ananda, who had been the Buddha's personal attendant for the last 25 years of his life. Since only Buddhist arhants were permitted to participate in the First Buddhist Council, we are fortunate that Ananda, rather conveniently it seems, attained arhantship on the night before the council met, since without his participation many of the Buddha's teachings would have been lost (one wonders if there were others not so fortunate who were not included). Thenceforth, the sangha would come together to rehearse the teachings of the Buddha based on the memories of the participants. Of course, as the participants died off, the nature of this transmission changed. From being memories of the actual hearers, the recollections increasingly focused on questions of doctrine and codification. These traditions were handed down in this way for 300 years. With the passage of time, it became increasingly important to verify the validity of these teachings.

It is therefore of interest to read in the Mahaparinirvana Sutta the criteria that were applied to verify the validity of the teachings that were passed down. The sutta identifies four primary sources of such teachings that may be considered: the Buddha himself, but also the community of elders and teachers, a group of many elders, and a single elder. The difference between the community of elders and a group of many elders is not clear, but the sources of authority are clear the Buddha himself and the senior bhikkhus or theras, both as individuals and in concert with others. According to the PED, any bhikkhu of any seniority may be called "thera" because of his wisdom, and, in fact, the Mahaparinirvana Sutta says that any monk may claim to have heard a teaching from "the Lord's own lips."

So much for the admissible sources of teachings. The Buddha then cautions that any such claim is neither to be approved nor disapproved. Rather, "his words and expressions should be carefully noted and compared with the Suttas and reviewed in the light of the discipline [Vinaya]." If the teaching conforms to the Suttas or the discipline, it is to

be accepted. If it does not conform, it is to be rejected. Thus, a continuous preservation of established tradition is guaranteed. The Buddha does not say who is sanctioned to verify the teachings. However, elsewhere he says that decisions are to be made by consensus of the sangha, or, failing consensus, by a majority.

An important point to note in this validation structure is that it is ideological, not historical. The primary criterion is not whether the words and circumstances of the teaching are historically accurate or not, but whether they conform to the established truth of the dharma based on previously accepted teachings. In other words, is there a reasonable continuity of teaching. Receiving a teaching from the Lord's own lips is the first criterion, but not the only one. Thus, the accusation that is frequently made against the Mahayana sutras that they are false because they are ahistorical is proved irrelevant. The truth or falsity of the Mahayana sutras is to be validated based on the same criteria as the Pali suttas themselves, i.e., do they carry on the established teachings of the Buddha as handed down by tradition? In this context, therefore, do they conform to the Pali suttas, which are doubtless older than all but the oldest Mahayana sutras (ca. 1st century BCE). In the same way, the conformity of the Pali texts with each other must also be subject to the same scrutiny.

Principle #28: The Buddha's Last Meal (4.18)

The Buddha's final meal is translated by Maurice Walshe as "pig's delight," thus glossing over the obscurity of the Pali phrase, sukara-maddava, which may refer to pork or a kind of truffle. This story has led to the speculation that the Buddha died of food poisoning. However, Dr. Mettanando Bhikkhu, in his article, "How the Buddha Died," suggests that food poisoning is an unlikely explanation of the Buddha's sickness: first, because the Buddha felt the onset of the sickness very quickly, whereas food poisoning takes several hours to incubate, and second, because food poisoning does not cause the bloody diarrhea described in the sutta. He also rejects chemical poisoning, peptic ulcer, and haemorrhoids. Dr. Mettanando's conclusion, based on the medical information in the sutta, is that the Buddha died of mesenteric infarction, a medical condition in which inflammation and injury of the small intestine result from inadequate blood supply – a common disease of the elderly that is lethal

after 10 to 20 hours. Thus, it was not the final meal that killed the Buddha, but old age, although the size of the meal that the Buddha consumed may have been the trigger that brought about the second and final episode of the disease that we know from previous passages had begun to afflict the Buddha some ten months' before. The cogency of Dr. Mettanando's analysis also gives us confidence in the historical accuracy of the Mahaparinirvana Sutta.

FIFTH RECITATION SECTION

Principle #29: Women (5.9)

In "The Status of Women in Ancient India and the Pali Tradition" I discuss two distinct attitudes towards women in the Pali Canon. One attitude disparages women, grudgingly admits that women are capable of enlightenment, and admits women to the sangha on that basis, whereas the other makes no distinction of any kind between men and women, and admits women to the sangha, apparently on an equal basis with men. As we have seen in our discussion of the Mahaparinirvana Sutta, the Buddha was not above enjoying a fine meal with a high-class prostitute. Here, however, we see another, quite incompatible attitude towards women: we should not look at them, we should not speak to them, and if they speak to us, we should be very careful. The Buddha, of course, did speak to Ambapali. He delivered a talk on the dharma to her, which (the text states) instructed, inspired, fired, and delighted her. Of course, it is possible that the rest of his entourage remained discreetly silent throughout the meal. Perhaps. On the other hand, perhaps what we are seeing here is two opposed views of women that are mutually incompatible, as Bhikkhu Bodhi has suggested in his introduction to the Anguttara Nikaya. If we accept Bodhi's view, then we must either believe that the Buddha held two incompatible views simultaneously; that he abandoned one view in favour of the other at some point in his career – perhaps when Ananda "convinced" him to allow women to be admitted to the sangha; or that one of these views is an imposition by anonymous misogynistic male monastic redactors of the Pali Canon. My view, which I consider the common sense one, is the last, since the first two views imply that the Buddha was unenlightened.

Principle #30: Who Was Ananda? (5.13)

It is ironic that Ananda, who was called the Guardian of the Dharma due to his photographic memory, was both the Buddha's closest disciple and the least accomplished. In many ways, he is portrayed in the suttas as being a bit thick. Nevertheless, he served the Buddha faithfully as his personal attendant during the final 25 years of the Buddha's mission, when the Buddha was 55 to 80 years old, and became the source of much of the sutta tradition collected in the Pali Canon. Ananda and the Buddha were first cousins through their father, King Suddhodhana. The Buddha described him as kind, unselfish, popular, and thoughtful, as well as chief in conduct, service, and memory. Nevertheless, Ananda's participation in the First Buddhist Council, convened by Mahakassapa, the Buddha's disciple who was foremost in asceticism, was contested because he was only a stream enterer. The Pali Canon portrays Ananda as an imperfect, albeit sympathetic, figure, lonely and isolated following the death of the Buddha. Nevertheless, he rather conveniently attains nirvana on the eve of the convention of the First Buddhist Council, during which he was heavily criticized by the arhants for persuading the Buddha to ordain women, as well as his failure to ascertain from the Buddha which were the major and which were the minor rules of the Vinaya.

Principle #31: The Gradual versus the Instantaneous Path (5.27)

The reference to four grades of attainment recalls the discussion that one finds in various places between advocates of the gradual path and advocates of the non-gradual path. That is, is enlightenment a process of gradual development or is enlightenment attained instantaneously? The four grades are of course the attainments of stream enterer, once-returner, non-returner, and arhant. It is, however, interesting that this path, that path of the arhant, which the Buddha doubtless taught, is not the path of the bodhisattva (lit. "awakening being"), which the Buddha himself followed, and the Pali Canon makes it clear that the ten powers of an arhant are not the same as the ten powers of a buddha. An essential difference, moreover, is that a bodhisattva/buddha is self-ordained by definition, as in the original samana tradition, which appears later in the Brahma Net and Srimala sutras, whereas an arhant always receives the dharma from a buddha. The Buddha himself is also referred to as an arhant, but an arhant is never referred to as a buddha. The distinction

between an arhant and a buddha became a point of contention following the Second Buddhist Council, which resulted in the great schism between the Mahasamghika majority, which subsequently developed into the Mahayana, and the Staviravada minority, which subsequently developed into the Hinayana, including what is now commonly referred to as the Theravada.

SIXTH RECITATION SECTION

Principle #32: The Dharma Retreat (6.1)

The imminent death of the Buddha obviously raised the problem of how the sangha should be organized after the Buddha's death. In these passages, the Buddha addresses this issue. First and foremost, the Buddha states that the dharma and the discipline – the Dharma-Vinaya, which is the name the Buddha always gave to his teaching – is to be the teacher after his death. In addition, whereas during the Buddha's lifetime the sangha was egalitarian, in which all members of the community addressed each other – even the Buddha – as "friend" (avuso), rather like the Quakers, after his death, the Buddha declared that the sangha should be organized as a decentralized hierarchy based on seniority, in which the junior monastics would address the senior monastics as "Venerable" (bhante) or "Reverend" (ayasma). Some scholars also hold that the formula of the Triple Jewel, i.e., the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, originated with Ashoka (3rd cent. BCE), whereas the original formula was singular. That is to say, the original Buddhists only took their refuge (sarana) in the Dharma alone.

Principle #33: The Minor Rules of the Vinaya (6.3)

Contrary to the fundamentalism of many followers of the Vinaya today, the Buddha further declared that the "lesser and minor" rules of the Vinaya might be abolished. Unfortunately, when the Buddha said this, it did not occur to Ananda to ask the Buddha which of the rules were major and which were minor, so the First Buddhist Council, led by Mahakassapa, the so-called Father of the Sangha, took the conservative approach of abolishing none of them. There are six Vinayas known today – that of the Theravada, Mahasamghika, Mahisasaka, Dharmaguptaka, Sarvativada, and Mulasarvastivada, three of which are still followed by the Theravada, East Asian Buddhists, and Tibetan Buddhists, but the scholarly consensus seems to be that the Mahasamghika Vinaya is the oldest. The

Mahasamghika subsequently developed into the Mahayana. Although many religious Buddhists strongly emphasize the rules of the Vinaya, the original Buddhist sangha did not follow any fixed set of rules. These developed gradually in response to specific situations. Apparently, the Buddha was quite flexible about the observance of rules. For example, according to the Vinaya itself the rules may be abrogated if required to do so for reasons of health or to prevent a crime. The Buddha frequently warns the monastics against excessive attachment to rules, rituals, and beliefs. A Vajjian monk complained to the Buddha that he could not stand such training with so many rules and regulations. Far from reprimanding him, the Buddha then asked him whether he could stand the threefold training in higher morality, higher thought, and higher insight. In Mahayana, these became the three higher trainings. Once proficient in this, lust, malice and delusion would be abandoned and no wrong deed would be performed without needing to follow the rules to the letter. The implication, then, is that slavish adherence to the letter of the rules is not required to attain emancipation. Interestingly, the Vajjians also brought about the great schism in the Buddhist order during the Second Buddhist Council on this question of rules. The core of the Vinaya is given in the pattimokkha. When one analyzes these rules, one finds just about ten essential rules, very similar in fact to the bodhisattva precepts. You can find them in various places online[88] grouped into rules that entail automatic expulsion from the sangha for life (parajikas), rules requiring an initial and subsequent meeting of the sangha (sanghadisesa) that result in a period of probation, indefinite rules (aniyata) based on acknowledgement of the offence, rules entailing confession with forfeiture (nissagiyya), rules entailing confession (paccitiyya), violations that must be verbally acknowledged (patidesaniya), and training rules (sekhiyavatta). The Brahma Net Sutra (mid-5th century) is one of the oldest summaries of the bodhisattva precepts, many variations of which exist. The ten major bodhisattva precepts are:

1. Not to kill or encourage others to kill.
2. Not to steal or encourage others to steal.
3. Not to engage in licentious acts or encourage others to do so.

[88] Including at http://en.dhammadana.org/sangha/vinaya/227.htm.

4. Not to use false words and speech, or encourage others to do so.
5. Not to trade or sell alcoholic beverages or encourage others to do so.
6. Not to broadcast the misdeeds or faults of the Buddhist assembly, nor encourage others to do so.
7. Not to praise oneself and denigrate others, or encourage others to do so.
8. Not to be stingy, or encourage others to be so.
9. Not to harbor anger or encourage others to be angry.
10. Not to speak ill of the Buddha, the Dharma or the Sangha (lit. the Triple Jewel) or encourage others to do so.

In addition, there are forty-eight minor rules, which are not always regarded as mandatory. Note that the consumption of alcohol is not expressly forbidden, only trade. Mrs. Rhys Davids argues in the introduction to her translation of the Khuddaka-Patha that it is not the "sensible use" of liquors, but rather the habit, frequency, and occasions for indulging in them, that was originally prohibited.[89] In any case, it is clear that the Vinaya regards it as a relatively minor offence, being the 51st of the ninety-two pacittiyas, requiring confession only, preceded by "not to witness military activities" and followed by "not to tickle." We know of course from the first sutta of the Digha Nikaya, the Supreme Net (Brahmajala Sutta), that the Buddha regarded ethical and moral rules to be oramattakam sīlamattakam – "merely profane (mundane), merely ethical (practices)," a statement that may surprise some religious.[90]

[89] *The Minor Anthologies of the Pali Canon,* xlvii.

[90] All of the patimokkha (pratimoksha) rules may be reduced to eight essential principles, as follows: 1. Not to indulge in lust or the appearance of lust (par 1, sam 1-5, ani 1-2, pac 6-7, 21-30, 43-45, 67, pat 1-2) 2. Not to take what is not given (par 2, nis 1-30, pac 14-15, 19, 31, 46-47, 58-60, 82-92, pat 3) 3. Not to kill or cause harm or hurt to beings (par 3, sam 6-7, pac 10-11, pac 16-18, 20, 48-50, 56-57, 61-62, 74-75) 4. Not to lie or gossip or use speech to cause harm or hurt to beings (par 4, 8, sam 8-13, pac 1-4, pac 8-9, 12-13, 63-64, 66, 68, 71-73, 76-81, pat 4) 5. Not to eat except when and as necessary to maintain health (pac 31-42) 6. Not to frequent drinking places or indulge in drunkenness (pac 51) 7. Not to elevate or indulge oneself (pac 52-55, 87) 8. Not to be a cause of any of these things. These eight principles constitute the so-called "higher morality" or "higher training," sans the lesser and minor rules that the Buddha said could be abolished. They are not "lesser" than the Vinaya, but identical with its essence. Consequently, anyone who follows these rules with bodhicitta is no different than an ordained person.

Principle #34: Subhadda and the First Buddhist Council (6.20)

Subhadda was the last monastic to be ordained by the Buddha. Maurice Walshe states in a note that this Subhudda is not the same as that one, perhaps because this Subhadda, a barber, is stated to have ordained late in life, whereas the other Subhadda was a samana (wandering ascetic) of another sect. On the other hand, some translations of the Mahaparinirvana Sutta refer to Subhadda the barber as "the late-received one," referring perhaps to his being the last disciple to be personally ordained by the Buddha rather than to his age. The Pali Canon denigrates him, and this may be the reason why he is distinguished from the samana Subhadda, but this may also reflect a sectarian prejudice. We know that the First Buddhist Council was contentious, and that this contentiousness persisted in later councils too. In any case, Subhadda the barber's suggestion that the rules might be relaxed is what precipitated the First Buddhist Council.

The First Buddhist Council was called together shortly after the Buddha's death by Mahakassapa, who was regarded as foremost in asceticism, despite the fact that Buddha said that the sangha should have no leader other than the dharma. Presumably, Mahakassapa also brought an ascetic orientation to the council and, as with all organizations, had both supporters and detractors. Indeed, it is clear from the Cullavagga that the council was sponsored by Mahakassapa's group, and that others were excluded.[91]

[91] See Horner, *The Book of Discipline,* Vol. 5, 395, n.1.

16
Secular Buddhism and the Denial of Rebirth
Is It Buddhist? Is It True?

Secular Buddhism goes by different names, including agnostic Buddhism, Buddhist agnosticism, ignostic Buddhism, atheistic Buddhism, pragmatic Buddhism, Buddhist atheism, or Buddhist secularism, but Secular Buddhism is the name of the main Wikipedia article so that is what I will call it here. The essential notion of secular Buddhism is that historical Buddhism is mired in supernaturalism, belief in the paranormal, superstition, hierarchy, patriarchy, gender exclusivity, etc., and should be liberated from these traditional limitations in order to make it acceptable to secular humanists, skeptics, agnostics, pragmatists, naturalists, rationalists, evidentialists, and modernists, mainly, but not exclusively, Westerners who are interested in Buddhism. Proponents of this view of Buddhism include Jack Kornfield, S.N. Goenka, and Stephen Batchelor. The basic assertion is that this form of Buddhism is closer to the original teachings of the Buddha as recorded in such early Buddhist texts as the Atthaka and Parayana vaggas of the Suttanipata before they were overtaken by religious dogmatism. Noted Japanese Buddhist scholar Hajime Nakamura has suggested that these texts "are very old" and "likely … existed even in the lifetime of Gotama Buddha,"[92] especially the Atthakavagga. The Khaggavisānasutta or "Rhinoceros Sutra" might also be included in this group.

[92] *Indian Buddhism,* 45.

These texts emphasize non-attachment to all views, which is assimilated by some Secular Buddhists to the Hellenistic philosophical tradition of Pyrrhonism, a school of philosophical skepticism of the 4th century BCE, founded by Pyrrho (ca. 360–ca. 270 BCE), who spent 18 months in India during the conquest of Alexander the Great (327–325 BCE), and may have been influenced by Buddhism. Ironically, Pyrrhonism also influenced Nagarjuna (ca. 150–ca. 250 CE), widely regarded as the greatest Buddhist philosopher. If Pyrrho were indeed influenced by the Buddha, this was very early indeed, as the Buddha passed ca. 397 BCE,[93] just about 70 years earlier. While it is not my intention here to discuss Secular Buddhism in its entirety, it is worth noting, besides the remarkable coincidence that it "just so happens" that, according to Secular Buddhists, early Buddhism exactly coincides with contemporary Western rationalist skepticism, the Atthakavagga ("Octet Chapter") includes references to such "superstitious" notions as nirvana, rebirth, transcendent realization, skilled means,[94] emptiness, wisdom (gnosis), ontology, the trans-dual, epistemology, sun worship,[95] truth, the ontological binary of mind and matter, non-rejection, heaven,[96] gods, and immortality. If one accepts one set of ideas because they appear, or are believed to appear, in these texts, why not accept the other set?

Thus, Secular Buddhists are as guilty of the same dogmatism that they, following the Buddha, reject in others, falling into the same trap that the Buddha criticizes: "If one who does tolerate another's view is a fool, a dolt and stupid, then all of them are fools without understanding, because all of them abide by their own views only.... They make their own individual views true. Therefore, they determine that another person is a fool."[97]

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93 Sarao, "The Date of the Buddha." Sarao's date is close to that of Norman, Hikata, Bechert, Nakamura, and Bareau.

94 The Buddha does not say that "purification" is neither attained by view, tradition, knowledge, virtue, or ritual, nor by their absence, but that these factors may be used as means of attainment without being grasped as things in themselves (Sn 839). This is the doctrine of skilled means (upaya). This is not quite the Secularist view that these things are irrelevant or even false.

95 The Buddha's family is said to have been descended from the Sun (Sn 915).

96 Specifically, the Tushita ("contented" or "joyous") heaven, associated in later texts with the abode of a bodhisattva before their final rebirth leading to Buddhahood. Tushita experiences time dilation, amounting to 400 human years for each divine day. Maitreya, the Coming Buddha, also resides here.

97 Sn 880, 882.

Similarly, Hajime Nakamura explicitly states that "early Buddhism" included belief in a True Self, rebirth, karma, dharma, the Five Groups (corporeality, feeling, perception, mental formations, consciousness), non-ego, and the "subconscious.[98] One view that one comes upon with increasing frequency, and thus I have determined to discuss it today, is the rejection of the pan-Indian doctrine of rebirth, despite, as noted above, its appearance in the oldest texts. The basic argument that is used is that the doctrine of rebirth cannot be substantiated empirically and is thus contrary to Buddhist rationalism which disdains belief in what is not evident. I have already shown that the latter is based on cherry picking passages that support one view while denigrating any other passages as late or whatnot that are inconsistent with this conclusion. From a Buddhist perspective, the belief in rebirth is quite empirical.

However, taking the Pali Canon as a whole, it is quite clear that the Buddha not only believed in rebirth, but experienced his own past lives, including memories of people, places, and situations in his immediate surroundings from his own past lives. While it is certainly true that the memories of past lives are not evident to most people today,[99] this criticism of the Buddhist teachings amounts to the statement that because something is not evident to common sense (i.e., unenlightened by definition), therefore the evidence of an enlightened realization is dismissed. The logical fallacy is obvious, and can be used to disprove that the earth orbits the sun, that atoms exist, that quantum physics is true because the mathematics that underlies it is incomprehensible to the common ruck, or a million other things commonly accepted as fact. In fact, science is constantly disproving common sense assumptions. The assumption that underlies the assertion that that which is not "scientific" is false is based on an erroneous conception of science as all-knowing and closed, neither of which is true. This dogmatic perspective is self-contradictory because it implies that the unenlightened mind is enlightened, in which case there is nothing to do.

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[98] *Indian Buddhism,* 63–66.

[99] Although this is not entirely true. Some young children spontaneously exhibit past-life recall, as do some of those who experience psychedelics such as DMT, etc., as well as trauma, similar to NDEs.

What we choose to investigate scientifically is often an expression of personal bias, having no basis in science, nor is the scientific method, based as it is on quantification, precise measurement, and repeatability, capable even in principle of universal application. The scientific worldview is not fixed; it expands and changes constantly. Dualistic, analytical reason can never grasp the totality because the whole is not a system, whereas reason can only proceed by systematic analysis and classification. Because something cannot be proved does not amount to disproof. It is notoriously difficult, if not impossible, to prove a negative.

In fact, many scientific theories are just that; there are very few, if any, scientific certainties. Scientific truth is provisional and probabilistic. Therefore, scientific skepticism is perfectly agnostic; to say that rebirth is disproved by science is an epistemological mistake. At best we can say, "based on our current understanding of the world, using the scientific experimental and analytical techniques available to us, at the present time there is no scientific evidence for rebirth." But even this highly qualified statement is false, since such evidence does exist.

Another tack that is taken is to denigrate the mind as such. Anything that originates in the mind is dismissed as imagination. Only matter is real. Mind itself is an epiphenomenon of matter, having no reality in itself, and prone to illusion, delusion, and error. However, the basis of science is not only observation, it is also mathematics, a discipline that originates in the mind, and includes a vast number of principles that cannot simply be deduced from observable material processes. It has its own inherent and transcendent logic. The fact that this is so is a great mystery, and implies a profound unity of mind and matter.

It is also a matter of immediate intuitive apprehension that mind cannot simply be reduced to material processes. Matter is unconscious and causal. Mind is conscious and ultimately and inherently volitional, albeit conditioned. According to quantum physics, the indeterminate waveform reality is collapsed by the "act of observation," thus producing the particular reality that we experience. This "act of observation" must be a reality of a different order from either the waveform or its particular expression, even though it clearly interacts with it.

Buddhism accepts mind as a sixth sense. If mind is a sense, then mind objects are as real as the objects of the other senses. Saying that mind is an epiphenomenon of matter is like saying that the radio program is an

artifact of the electronics of the radio, that the tv program is an artifact of the electronics of the tv, or that the computer software is an artifact of the computer hardware. Yet there are people, mostly Marxists and psychotics, who actually believe this. Mind and matter are mutually incommensurable, though clearly correlated.

If we examine our own experience, we see if we look at the very small that it loses individuality and definition the closer we look. The experience of the body is progressively dissolved into microbes, bacteria, viruses, cells, molecules, elements, atoms, sub-atomic particles, and ultimately probabilistic stresses in space that have no particular existence at all. The quantum froth is an indeterminate chaotic matrix. As the Buddha says, there is no self in any of it. As we go deeper and deeper into the nature of reality, we find less definition, not more, until finally we come to the pure geometrical abstractions of Planck-length and Planck-time, the "pixels" of experiential reality.

It is obvious therefore that the patterns that characterize the objects that we experience including each other do not arise from below, but from above. According to quantum physics, it is the "act of observation" which collapses the wave form, determining whether Schrodinger's cat lives or dies. And so for all of the objects of our experience, ranging from our own bodies and the bodies or others to the planets, stars, galaxies, galaxy filaments, universes, multiverses, planes, and whatnot that make up the macrocosm. Given all this, why should we find the notion of rebirth so incomprehensible? In fact, we experience death-rebirth in every moment of existence, when we sleep and awake, and in all of nature, which is based on the universal cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. And yet we can go further.

A common claim of skeptics is that there is no "evidence" for rebirth, similar to similar claims made by skeptics vis a vis the UFO phenomenon. Both are wrong. Dr. Ian Stevenson (1918–2007) was a Canadian-born American psychiatrist who worked for the University School of Medicine for 50 years, including as chair of the department of psychiatry. He was the founder and director of the Division of Perceptual Studies, which studied so-called paranormal phenomena. Over a period of 40 years he undertook extensive international fieldwork into the hypothesis that emotions, memories, and physical bodily features can be transferred from one life to another.

Stevenson investigated three thousand cases of children who claimed to remember past lives. He wrote fourteen books and about 300 papers on reincarnation. Robert Almeder, an academic specializing in logic and the philosophy of science, also conducted a thorough investigation of the evidence for the post-mortem survival of the human personality, and concluded that the evidence of the post-mortem survival of the human personality is at least as good as the evidence of their past existence of dinosaurs, which is generally accepted by science:

> There is something essential to some human personalities ... which we cannot plausibly construe solely in terms of either brain states, or properties of brain states ... and, further, after biological death this non-reducible essential trait sometimes persists for some time, in some way, in some place, and for some reason or other, existing independently of the person's former brain and body. Moreover, after some time, some of these irreducible essential traits of human personality, for some reason or other, and by some mechanism or other, come to reside in other human bodies either some time during the gestation period, at birth, or shortly after birth.

Buddhism is a sophisticated metaphysical philosophy, every part of which is integrated with every other part. If we reject the doctrine of rebirth, the consequences for Buddhism are critical. Some Secular Buddhists would have it that Buddhism is just a sort of psychotherapy, a theory of the relationship between desirous attachment and suffering, which can be ameliorated by means of insight into the nature of experience, the cultivation of dispassion, and the practice of "mindfulness." Nirvana is nothing other than a state of calm. But if we remove rebirth and the goal of timeless immortality from the equation, and all ends in annihilation anyway, if the goal is simply the elimination of desire, why not just shoot yourself now and save yourself the trouble of spiritual practice? The end result is the same. Thus, Buddhism becomes a sort of nihilism, which the Buddha explicitly denied.

It might also be argued that faced with the choice of mixed pleasure and pain and suicide, it is actually more rational to maximize wholesome pleasures, perhaps by benefitting others, and minimize pain, rather than to give up all pleasure now. "Take your pleasure while you can," as Richard Gere declared in *American Gigolo.* Moreover, the doctrine of karma holds that every cause produces its just effect. However, if there is no rebirth,

then the causes which remain "unripened" at death simply vanish. Therefore, it is not true that every cause produces its just effect.[100]

This conclusion undermines morality and combined with the previous notion, justifies a form of hedonism, precisely the opposite of what the Buddha taught. In fact, a number of monastics did commit suicide, which the Buddha condemned. The Buddha also condemned nihilism and immorality. How then can this doctrine be denominated Buddhism? Why call yourself a Buddhist at all if you hold views that are clearly at variance with the fundamentals of the Buddha's teachings? To that, unfortunately, I have no answer. You will need to ask the Secular Buddhists.

That said, there is a very real sense in which the Buddhist doctrine of rebirth is false, since it is samsaric, and everything samsaric is illusory. The True Self, being an absolutely simple and indivisible monad by definition, exists eternally in a timeless present, only it is ignorantly involved in its spatio-temporal projections, to which it attributes its own reality, but is constantly frustrated by their unsatisfactory, transitory, and illusory nature. In order to cross the river one must withdraw all those projections through radical insight and self-realization, after which it can discard them and simply rest in the state of perfection. Universally accepted, this realization has the potential to change the world.

[100] Thus violating the law of causality, fundamental in science also.

17
Buddhist Hermeneutics and the Problem of Tradition

Buddhist hermeneutics – from the Greek hermeneutikos, "of or for interpreting," commonly but erroneously associated with the Greek god Hermes, the messenger of the Gods – is still in its infancy in the West, as the Dharma Transmission to the West, now in its 116th year, continues to take hold and proliferate. The most common Buddhist hermeneutic, especially among both traditional and modern Theravadins, is historicism, i.e., the belief that the meaning of the Buddhist message is identical with the words uttered by Siddhattha Gotama (ca. 445 – ca. 400 BCE), the historical Buddha. Although this hermeneutic may seem to many to be straightforward and self-evident, critical evaluation reveals it to involve numerous problems, including:

- Objective identification of the actual historical words of the Buddha (the Buddhavacana);
- Determination of the correct meanings of the words and the doctrines that they imply;
- Resolution of apparent contradictions;
- Resolution of apparent nonsense, including the problem of what nonsense actually is in the context of cultural relativism (i.e., what may be nonsense to you may not be nonsense to me and

vice versa, and what may be nonsense to us may not have been nonsense 2,500 years ago); and
- The question of whether the Buddhavacana is comprehensive, complete, and exclusive, even if it is accurate and true.

These problems occur against a religious backdrop that tends to hold, influenced by the Buddhist doctrine of the "degenerate age," that "later = bad," thus disparaging later texts as inherently non-historical and dubious, even within the canonical tradition of the Pali Canon itself. This kind of analytical necrotizing fasciitis threatens to devolve into nihilism. The latter also represents a decisive break with orthodox Theravada, even though many who criticize the Pali Canon in this way hold themselves out to be Theravadin.

The orthodox Theravada, which still has numerous adherents, both in Asia and in the West, holds that the Pali texts of the Pali Canon, including the Vinaya, Suttas, and Abhidhamma, all incorporate the exact words used by Siddattha Gotama, in the language spoken by the Buddha, remembered pre-eminently by Ananda, who was graced with the gift of a photographic memory, and verified by the arhants of the First Buddhist Council and their successors who were perfect and infallible in their understanding of the dharma. Thus, the collective text of the Pali Canon is the literal Buddhavacana, handed down without error for 2,500 years. We in the West are of course familiar with such thinking amongst Jews and Christians (the Bible is the literal inspired Word of Yahweh or the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) and Muslims (the Qur'an is the literal Word of Allah, dictated to Mohammed by the angel Gabriel and preserved through an impeccable process of collation, after which all deviant texts were destroyed).

However, even if we accept the orthodox premise, the problem of hermeneutics is not yet solved. There is still the problem of interpreting the meaning of the language of the infallibly revealed scriptures and doctrines and the questions of whether these meanings are complete and comprehensive, and whether the texts themselves exhaust all possible meanings, therefore illegitimizing any subsequent interpretation.

A lot of academic and scholarly effort has been put into the Pali Canon in the past 100 years, thanks to the pioneering efforts of F. Max Müller, Rhys Davids, and others. Although there are extremists who deny any

legitimacy to the Pali Canon, the general consensus today is that the Pali Canon, especially the Four Great Nikayas, so-called (the Digha, Majjhima, Samyutta, and Anguttara), represent the historically oldest strata of Buddhist scriptures, and are probably substantially similar to the books that were compiled in the 1st century BCE, 350 years after the death of the Buddha, even though we have few texts actually dating from that period due to the perishable nature of the writing materials that were used.[101] This has led some denialists to reject the Pali Canon tradition entirely as the invention of "Western Orientalists." It might even be true that some of these texts are substantially similar to the texts as they appeared in the mid-3rd century BCE, about 150 years after the Buddha's death. (For comparison, this corresponds to the Christian literature between 180 and 380 CE, none of which is canonical.)

On the other hand, the Pali Canon has the virtues of repetition and size, so that it is possible to identify recurrent themes in the texts that were presumably emphasized in the original teachings. However, even here there is controversy. The important Polish Buddhologist, Stanislaw Schayer, undeservedly little known in the West, opined that the exceptional, contrary, and idiosyncratic material that was left in the Pali Canon may be even more significant than the stock doctrines precisely because they were left in the Canon by its conservative redactors. By emphasizing these teachings, Schayer arrives at a proto-Mahayanist view that contradicts the mainstream view that still regards the Theravada as the most historically authentic school. Based on the current consensus of the dates of the Buddha, called the "median chronology," which places his "passing" (parinirvana) ca. 400 BCE, these texts were passed down orally for about 300 years before being committed to writing, although some parts of some texts may have been written down as early as the 3rd century BCE. The Four Nikayas consist of several thousand suttas, or "discourses," mostly attributed to the Buddha, purportedly delivered over the course of 45 years after his Enlightenment experience. These include the places, names of the interlocutors, and sometimes evidential information concerning the relative dates of the discourses. However this information is highly dubious given two passages in the Vinaya that describe a process of arbitrarily assigning places to suttas for which places were not known,

[101] The oldest actual texts date to 11th century CE Sri Lanka.

and discrepancies of places and people involved in discourses that are very similar or even identical (of course, it is also possible that the Buddha gave the same or similar discourses in different places or to different people, especially during the last years of his teaching career). On the other hand, the doctrinal significance of such differences is negligible.

In English translation, the Four Nikayas constitute about five thousand pages, or three million words. This corresponds to roughly 320 hours of speech, about 7 hours for each year that the Buddha reportedly taught. The suttas represent the Buddha as engaged in a virtually continuous process of communication with monastics, lay followers, and interested visitors based on a dialogic question-and-answer interaction. Clearly, if this is true, 7 hours per year does not come close to what the Buddha must actually have said, even allowing for repetitions, which also occur in the Pali suttas themselves, so these cancel out. Thus, it seems that the view of the Dharmaguptaka, a sect of the Hinayana (ca. 232 BCE), that the "original teachings of the Buddha had been lost," is justified, at least in part. It has also been pointed out that many of the passages in the Pali Canon pertaining to the major doctrines are merely lists of headings; the doctrines themselves are not explained in any detail. Thus, a great range of interpretations is still possible.

Most scholars today do not believe that the Pali language in which the Pali Canon is preserved is the actual language of the historical Buddha. Rather, Pali appears to have been an artificial language hybridizing several prakrit dialects constructed post facto in order to address the increasing linguistic and geographic diversity of the Buddhist community (sangha) that originated in Western India during the 3rd century BCE. On the other hand, it seems likely that Pali was similar to the language or languages that the Buddha actually spoke. Thanks to the herculean efforts of the Pali Text Society, especially the *Pali-English Dictionary,* Pali is fairly well understood, though more comparative and historical studies of the vocabulary as used throughout the Canon need to be done and are now possible using computer analysis. Pali and Sanskrit also draw on a common set of etymological roots in Vedic proto-Sanskrit, the study of which greatly facilitates interpretation and translation. Peter Masefield has complained, however, that Pali translators are insufficiently attentive to the technical philosophical meanings of the words.

The state of knowledge in this area has been nicely summarized by Bhikkhus Sujato and Brahmali in their monograph on this topic entitled "The Authenticity of the Early Buddhist Texts." Rhys Davids and Pande[102] have also made significant contributions. Sujato and Brahmali appear to adhere to the revisionist Theravada school sometimes called "Modern Theravada," a.k.a. Progressive Theravada, Early Buddhism, or Original Buddhism. The main conclusion of this study that is relevant to the present discussion is that the Early Buddhist Texts (EBTs), which they identify generally with the Four Great Nikayas and some other texts including the Vinaya disciplinary code (patimokkha), parts of the Sutta Nipata, Udana, Itivuttaka, Dhammapada, Theragatha, and Therigatha, are "authentic." Their general argument is that the description of the political geography, social conditions, economic conditions and trade, and religious context accurately correspond to the period during which the Buddha lived and taught; that the oral textual transmission is both reliable and dateable; that the remarkable vision and consistency of the Canon, including peculiarities that can only be explained historically, is evidence of a unitary founder who was a real historical person; that archaeological research supports the antiquity and accuracy of the Pali Canon and the reality of the Buddha; and that a comparison of later and earlier strata of the Canon shows an ideological development typical of other religions.

The whole tenor of Sujato and Brahmali's argument consists of general assertions of this kind, such specific passages as they adduce having little or no doctrinal significance. However, even if we grant the veracity of this argument, it comes nowhere near proving their main thesis, their "theory of authenticity" (TOA), i.e., "that texts that purport of be the words of the historical Buddha and his immediate disciples were in fact spoken by them."[103] Although their language largely finesses this point, if their argument is that the words contained in these texts accurately preserve the actual words of the historical Buddha, and not merely the general situation,[104] this conclusion is far too specific to be supported by the

[102] *Studies in the Origins of Buddhism.*

[103] "The Authenticity of the Early Buddhist Texts," 9.

[104] In fact three forms of the TOA are identifiable: (1) the strong form: where the Pali Canon quotes the historical Buddha, it does so accurately, with little or no variation from his actual diction and syntax (the orthodox Theravadin view); (2) the semi-strong form: where the Pali Canon quotes the Buddha, it does so using diction and syntax that broadly resembles the actual diction and syntax of the historical Buddha; (3) the weak form: the

evidence that they adduce. Perhaps it would be fair to say, then, that the Pali Canon preserves an overview or outline of the major doctrines of the historical Buddha as interpreted by his successors and preserved as they were perceived and understood roughly 150 to 300 years after the Buddha's passing. I believe Bhikkhu Bodhi has made the point more correctly when he states that the Pali Canon may include passages that resemble certain statements originally made by the Buddha. The problem then becomes how to identify and extract the utterances of the Buddha, such as they are, from the mass of material in which they are embedded, or if this is even possible.

Some Pali linguists would like to suggest that the strict application of a scientific methodology of Pali linguistics to the Pali Canon in combination with other critical methods could identify such passages. However, in practice one finds that such academics tend to find what they want to find, merely constructing an explanatory framework that justifies post facto their own particular view. One can of course "connect the dots" to justify any particular theory in retrospect, simply rejecting passages as "late" or using other criteria (e.g., "Indian" or "Hindu") that do not conform to one's preferred interpretation, based on the fallacy already alluded to that "late = bad." (Academics frequently fall into this hole.) Let us look at this hermeneutical doctrine in detail.

The assertion that "late = bad" is based on two premises: (1) that everything that is true about the Buddha's teachings was said by the Buddha himself, and perhaps his immediate disciples, and (2) that no doctrinal development is possible or permissible. That is to say, that the Buddha's teachings are comprehensive, complete, and exclusive. Therefore, all that is necessary is to identify the "original teachings." However, I have already shown that it is extremely improbable that the Pali Canon preserves all of the original teachings of the Buddha or that it is even possible to identify the actual words of the Buddha. What we have is a composite of what the Buddha said, what his immediate disciples understood him to mean, and what their successors understood them all

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general situations described in the Pali Canon accurately portray the life and times of the Buddha, including his general ideas; some actual sayings of the Buddha probably survive in the Canon, and it is possible to trace a kind of chronological development in the Canon. The weak form of the TOA necessarily allows for a broad range of alternative doctrinal formulations. At best, the evidence for the TOA supports the weak form.

to mean, all inextricably interwoven together into an aggregate of texts, some earlier, some later, some a mixture of earlier and later, and some of indeterminate earliness or lateness, and all embedded in a particular cultural system or systems. Moreover, it is clear that the Pali tradition moved gradually over time after the Buddha's death, first from northeast to western India, and then south to Sri Lanka, thus exposing it to a variety of cultural influences. If one's objective were to actually identify the objectively precise technical language used by the historical Buddha, on which alone precise hermeneutical interpretations could be based, I would submit that this state of affairs is so complex and so ineffable that it is, practically speaking, impossible to sort out in an analytical or reductionist way, leaving us with a non-exclusive "general outline" theory at best.

Moreover, even if we accept that we can identify in broad outline perhaps even most of the original teachings of the historical Buddha, does this mean (1) that we have actually understood what the Buddha meant by those teachings, or (2) that those meanings are incapable of further understanding through a process of progressive examination, refinement, elucidation, and realization? With respect to the first point, the whole tenor of this discussion so far has been focused on the person of the historical Buddha. This bias corresponds to the use of the English word, "Buddhism," literally "the doctrine of the one who understands." However, if we accept the Pali text, the actual word used by the Buddha to refer to his philosophy is Dharma-Vinaya, literally "teaching and training," which might be interpreted as training in the truth, i.e., more or less what we might mean by "education." Elsewhere he also refers to his followers as "sons of the Shakyan," referring to Shakya, the Buddha's home country. It is quite clear, however, that the Buddha's object of concern was not himself, but rather the dharma or truth itself, in its most general and universal meaning, i.e., the truth of being or reality, which he discussed and debated with his contemporaries, not merely as personal opinions, but rather as an objective reality that can be discussed, known, understood, and realized both by individuals and collectively through a critical dialogic process.

The Buddha did not merely discuss the dharma with his disciples. If we accept the Buddha as the Buddha, then we accept him as the supreme expositor of this truth, at least when and where he lived, but there is no

suggestion in the Pali texts themselves that the Buddha's realization was personal, exclusive, or arbitrary in any sense. He also discussed it with other samanas, with whom he shared the desire to comprehend and realize this truth, even though they were not Buddhists in the narrow, sectarian sense in which the word is used today. Therefore, this truth is objective. His doing so implies that he believed that it was possible for him and them to come to a shared understanding of the dharma. His primary purpose was not merely conversion or persuasion, but shared understanding, although of course by declaring himself to be the Buddha he was also implying that his realization was superlative. Here we depart decisively from mere academic scholarship, which is only concerned with establishing "the facts of the matter," generally in historicist and social contexts. As Buddhists, our primary focus is (or should be) not merely to understand the Buddha, but also, through understanding the Buddha, to understand the dharma. Thus, we have dharmic and non-dharmic (or profane) scholarship. While the latter may have utility to us, as Buddhists, only the former is of fundamental or ultimate concern. This raises many additional and subtle questions and concerns that go far beyond mere academic or profane scholarship.

Can we understand the dharma entirely and exclusively by understanding the person of the Buddha? Even the Buddha is ultimately merely an historically and culturally contingent phenomenon. Is the dharma something that is fixed or frozen in time, identical with the original words of the Buddha that we seek to discover in the Pali Canon? Is the dharma even "historical"? Is the Buddha the sole authority for understanding the dharma? If the dharma can be understood by his successors, and the Buddha's teaching career makes no sense otherwise, then there must be successors who are also authorities, perhaps even buddhas themselves, whose utterances are therefore also relevant to understanding Buddhism, perhaps even more relevant than the Pali Canon. If the Buddha has successors, then he may have had predecessors. There is no suggestion in the Pali Canon that the Buddha claimed to be unique. Rather, again, if we accept the relevant texts, the Buddha stated that he was merely rediscovering an ancient truth, known to but long forgotten by the brahmans and perhaps others too. This provides additional contexts for understanding the dharma that go beyond the place, time, and historical and cultural circumstances of the Buddha.

Ultimately, dharma is the truth of reality itself. Therefore, it cannot be separated from any other form of knowing. As the truth of reality, it must be universal and implicit in all. Since reality is boundless and indeterminate, it seems extremely improbable that the Pali Canon encodes or could encode the totality of dharma. Therefore, how can we restrict ourselves to it as anything other than a provisional foundation for further elaborations and exegeses, potentially even limitless in extent?

18
The Status of Women in Ancient India and the Pali Tradition

In December 2012, a 23-year-old woman was attacked, gang raped, and beaten with an iron bar on a public bus in Delhi, India. She and her boyfriend were then pushed out of the bus into the street. Her boyfriend escaped with his life, but the woman died of massive internal injuries. This incident, which made the headlines worldwide, underlines a serious problem, not just in India, but also in all of Asia and, indeed, the whole world. It was not an isolated incident. A month later, another woman was raped in similar circumstances. Studies show that 25% of Asian men have committed at least one act of rape. In some Asian countries, the percentage is as high as 50%. In India, 53% of children have been sexually abused. Parents who do not wish to have female children routinely abort female fetuses, and it is common for female children to be intentionally malnourished and uneducated compared to boys. At the same time, Bollywood films fetishize sex in the most sensational and vulgar ways and portray women as sex objects.

The situation in Buddhist countries is better, but women are still often relegated to second-class status. The order of female monastics, the bhikkhunisangha, has died out in most Buddhist countries. This is due to the discriminatory rules that were imposed in ancient times to keep the nuns "in their place." In Theravada countries, nuns, where they exist at all, are forced to comply with 311 monastic rules, compared to 227 for the

monks.[105] A nun with 100 years' seniority must defer to a monk of 1 day's seniority. In Thailand, it is actually illegal for a woman to wear robes as a nun. Were she to do so, she would be charged with the crime of impersonating a monastic. Religious Buddhists accept this because they are taught that this is how the Buddha set it up.

In the West, an alarming number of Buddhist teachers, in different traditions, have been implicated in sex scandals of one sort or another. VisionTV has published an exposé of this subject entitled *In the Name of Enlightenment*. In Nepal, suicides of monks, disgraced for sexual infractions, are a common occurrence.

Here I will discuss the status of women in pre-Buddhist India as well as the India of the Buddha's time in order to establish context. I will then critically evaluate the Buddha's own sexuality and the attitudes to women and sexuality attributed to him in the Pali Canon, especially in the suttas. I will discuss the context in which the rules for monks and nuns were codified in the Vinaya during the First Buddhist Council and later, including the philosophical or "theological" implications of this discussion. Finally, I will conclude with a survey of the status of women in the Buddhist world today and consider the significance of this discussion for the Dharma Transmission to the West.

THE TRADITIONAL INDIAN VIEW OF WOMEN IN THE EARLY AND LATE VEDIC PERIODS

Indus Valley Civilization (3500–1300 BCE) and Its Cultural Legacy

The ancient Indian—or Harappan—civilization emerged in the late 4th millennium BCE and reached its peak between 2600 and 1900 BCE. Spanning an area of approximately 1.6 million square kilometers, it extended from northeastern Afghanistan in the west to Pakistan and northwestern India in the east. At its height, it supported an estimated population of five million, making it the largest of the three great Bronze Age civilizations, alongside Egypt and Mesopotamia.

The Harappan people developed advanced urban and technological systems: grid-planned cities, multi-storey baked brick houses, complex

[105] In Tibet the numbers are 253 rules for monks and 263 for nuns. The latter is merely on paper, because I do not believe a bhikkhunisangha was ever established in Tibet. Tibetans follow the Mulasarvastivada Vinaya.

sewage and drainage infrastructure, public water supply, and large, non-residential public buildings whose function remains unclear but may have been administrative or religious. This was a highly organized and mercantile society, with widespread trade networks reaching as far as Sumer, as attested by the discovery of Indus seals in Mesopotamian sites.

Harappan artisans worked with copper, bronze, lead, and tin, and developed sophisticated techniques in metallurgy and handicraft. Over 2,600 archaeological sites have been identified, although the Indus script remains undeciphered. Many scholars suggest that it is related to the Dravidian language family—a non-Indo-European linguistic group still spoken in southern India and Sri Lanka. This suggests a cultural and linguistic continuity that survives to this day.

While much remains unknown about Harappan religion and society, the evidence we do have suggests a highly stratified but relatively peaceful culture, with no conclusive evidence of standing armies, fortifications, or large-scale warfare. Society appears to have included religious, merchant, and labouring classes. Numerous goddess figurines, often made from terracotta, and the absence of obvious symbols of male dominance have led scholars to speculate about the importance of female deities and the possible social influence of women. The discovery that men may have moved into the homes of their brides—an apparent form of matrilocality—has been interpreted by some researchers as indicating a matrilineal or at least female-positive social structure.

Clay goddess effigies—often crude in workmanship but ubiquitous—suggest the widespread worship of a Mother Goddess figure. According to Gupta (2002), "the Goddess was not favoured by the upper classes who commanded the services of the best craftsmen, but... her effigies were mass-produced by humble potters to meet popular demand." The sheer number of these figurines implies that this deity was venerated in daily life, likely kept in private homes for purposes of fertility, protection, and household prosperity.

One of the most iconic artifacts is the so-called "Dancing Girl," a bronze statuette of a young woman, naked except for bangles and a necklace, standing in a relaxed, confident pose with one hand on her hip. Her elaborate coiffure, slender build, and self-assured expression suggest a culture that appreciated both feminine beauty and artistic expression. "Her face has an air of lively pertness quite unlike anything in the work of

other ancient civilizations," Gupta writes, noting that the Harappan aesthetic diverged markedly from that of later, more ascetic Indian ideals.

A particularly significant motif is found on a seal unearthed in the city of Mohenjo-Daro: a horned figure seated cross-legged, surrounded by animals. This image, commonly identified as Pashupati—"Lord of the Animals"—is often interpreted as a proto-Shiva figure. The presence of phallic symbols resembling later lingams reinforces this association. If this identification is correct, the roots of Shiva-Shakti worship may reach back into pre-Vedic times. In later Hindu metaphysics, Shiva represents the male creative principle—life, death, and rebirth—while Shakti, literally "power" or "energy," is his dynamic consort and metaphysical complement. Without her, Shiva is inert, passive, even impotent. In the human being, Shakti becomes the manifestation of intelligence, creativity, compassion, and divine love.

Although the full flowering of Shaktism as a distinct religious tradition did not occur until around 400 CE, references to Shakti appear in the Rigveda, and goddesses cognate with her appear at least 40 times. Thus, the conceptual and devotional basis of goddess worship in India may stretch back not only to the Vedic period but into the pre-Vedic past, possibly as far as the late Paleolithic. The prominence of female figurines, the apparent respect for women, and the symbolic associations of power, beauty, and fertility all suggest that the Harappans contributed essential elements to the later religious culture of the subcontinent.

In contrast to the patriarchal, martial structures of many contemporary civilizations, the Indus Valley appears to have been relatively pacific, urban, and mercantile. While no direct connection can be conclusively established, the possibility that elements of later Indian religion—especially goddess worship and Shaivism—may be rooted in this ancient, enigmatic culture remains a compelling hypothesis.

Aryan Incursion (1500–1200 BCE)

The decline of the Indus Valley Civilization around 1900 BCE appears to have been the result of multiple converging factors, including climate change, river system shifts, and gradual economic decline. Following this, new groups migrated into the Indian subcontinent, among them Indo-Aryan pastoralist tribes originating from the Central Asian steppe region, possibly near the Caspian or Black Sea. These groups brought with them

a patriarchal, horse-based warrior culture, and their arrival over several centuries led to profound transformations in the region's social, linguistic, and religious landscape.

Rather than a single military "invasion," the Indo-Aryan migration was likely a complex and prolonged process of cultural interaction, assimilation, and displacement. The Rigveda, the earliest Indo-Aryan religious text, contains poetic references to conflicts with Indigenous peoples which may reflect dim memories of these cultural confrontations. Many scholars now interpret these encounters as ideological or tribal rather than racial, and the term "Aryan" itself, meaning "noble," was more an ethno-linguistic marker than a racial category.

The earlier Dravidian-speaking populations, possibly descended from the Harappans, were gradually displaced to the south, although significant cultural and genetic continuity between Harappan and later Indian civilizations suggests deep integration as well.

Among the contributions of the Indo-Aryans to early Indian religion was the ritual use of Soma, a mysterious psychoactive plant drink, celebrated in the Rigveda as a divine elixir that conferred insight, strength, and immortality. The exact identity of Soma is unknown, though candidates have included ephedra, Amanita muscaria (fly agaric mushroom), cannabis, or a combination involving poppy derivatives. While speculative, some researchers argue that Soma was a stimulant or entheogen central to early Vedic religious experience. The hymns are said to have been "inspired by Soma," which was personified as a god and praised in ecstatic poetry.

This period of cultural fusion gave rise to what is now called the Vedic civilization, forming the basis for classical Hinduism and much of Indian religious and philosophical thought to the present day.

Rigvedic Period (1500–1000 BCE)

The idea that women held a relatively high status in ancient Indian civilization—particularly in the Harappan and early Vedic periods—is supported by many scholars, though the extent and nature of that status remain debated. Some researchers argue that the archaeological evidence from the Indus Valley suggests a society that, while not necessarily matriarchal, may have featured more prominent roles for women than later Brahmanical culture did. Figurines of goddesses, the prevalence of

female icons, and matrilocal practices—such as evidence that men may have moved into the homes of their wives—suggest a possible female-positive social structure.

Gurholt (2004) notes that although the Indus Valley civilization was likely patriarchal in basic structure, it appears to have differed significantly from the more rigid patriarchy introduced by the Indo-Aryan migrants. She associates the rise of patrilineality, patrilocality, and pronounced social hierarchy with the Aryan incursion and the institutionalization of Brahmanism. "The Indo-European Aryans," she writes, "contributed to and heightened the hierarchical, patriarchal social structure of ancient India." She also contends that sexism and patriarchy were inconsistent with the earliest Vedic and Buddhist philosophical principles, which emphasized spiritual equality and individual realization.

During the early Vedic period (c. 1500–1000 BCE), women appear to have enjoyed a degree of agency and social participation that would later decline under classical Brahmanical orthodoxy. Vedic texts refer to women participating in religious rituals, tribal assemblies, and receiving formal education. They were permitted to choose their husbands, marry more than once, remarry as widows, and even divorce. Child marriage was unknown in this period. Some women also pursued asceticism and spiritual realization, including the path of renunciation.

Despite being composed primarily by and for men, the Vedas themselves include hymns attributed to female sages, such as Lopamudra, Apala, Ghosha, Vagambhrini, and Visvavara in the Rigveda. The Samaveda and later texts also mention additional female seers. In the Upanishads and epic literature, women like Maitreyi, Gargi, and Sulabha are portrayed as intellectually and spiritually accomplished figures who engage in philosophical discourse with men on equal terms.

These examples suggest that women were not only participants in ancient Indian religious and philosophical life, but in some cases were regarded as authorities. However, over time, as Brahmanical patriarchy solidified, many of these rights and freedoms were curtailed.

Later Vedic Period (1000 BCE–500 BCE)

During the later Vedic period, the increasing dominance of Brahmanism coincided with the consolidation of patriarchal norms that profoundly restricted the social, religious, and intellectual roles of women. A shift

occurred from the earlier ritual use of Soma—possibly a psychoactive plant used in Vedic rites—to a symbolic fire sacrifice, accompanied by an increasing formalization and priestly control of religious practice. Over time, the exact identity and preparation of Soma was forgotten, and its ritual significance became largely symbolic.

Parallel to this, the reverence for female divinities diminished. Goddesses lost prominence within the Vedic pantheon, and women were increasingly excluded from religious life. Rights that Vedic women once appear to have enjoyed—such as access to education, participation in tribal assemblies, freedom in marriage, and spiritual autonomy—were gradually withdrawn. Vedic study was increasingly restricted to male Brahmans, and women were barred from both ritual authority and intellectual inquiry.

Social customs hardened accordingly. Arranged marriages and child marriages became more common. Widow remarriage was discouraged or prohibited; property rights were denied to women; and divorce, once allowed, was outlawed. Female chastity was sacralized and rigidly enforced, not only for spiritual reasons but also as a mechanism of social control. Women were seen as embodiments of family honour and became subject to increasingly restrictive codes of behaviour, including seclusion, veiling, and the idealization of self-immolation as a supreme act of loyalty. In legal and ritual texts like the Manusmriti, women were often likened to the lowest social class, emphasizing their subservience.

These developments paralleled a deeper ideological shift within Vedic religion. A growing division emerged between two classes of deities: the divine beings and the antigods. While earlier hymns of the Rigveda often depict them as spiritually powerful and even noble beings—such as Varuṇa, Mitra, and Aryaman—later texts began to vilify the antigods as demonic and cast them as enemies of the divine beings. This theological inversion appears to reflect a socio-political realignment within Vedic society, whereby older, possibly non-Brahmanical or heterodox traditions were suppressed by a more hierarchical, Brahman-dominated orthodoxy.

In western parts of the Indian subcontinent and Iran, these rejected traditions may have retained their influence. The Zoroastrian religion, which arose in ancient Persia, reveres Ahura Mazda—"Wise Lord"—whose name and nature bear striking resemblance to the

Vedic antigod Varuṇa. In Zoroastrianism, daevas are malevolent beings, suggesting that the division between divine being and antigod may reflect not merely mythology but also an historical schism between different Indo-Iranian religious cultures. In this view, the triumph of deva worship in India correlates with the institutionalization of caste, patriarchy, and Brahmanical supremacy.

Developments in 6th–5th Century BCE India

By the time of the Buddha in the 6th to 5th centuries BCE, the traditional Brahmanical culture rooted in Vedic ritualism had become increasingly rigid and disconnected from the socio-economic realities of early Iron Age India. The sacrificial religion of the Brahmans, developed for an earlier tribal and agrarian context, no longer spoke meaningfully to the urbanizing populations of the Middle Gangetic Plain. This region—once part of the heartland of the Indus Valley civilization some two millennia earlier—had become a crucible of intellectual and spiritual experimentation. New forms of wealth were emerging through trade, artisanal production, and land ownership, elevating the status of merchant and working classes. The resulting social mobility unsettled traditional caste hierarchies and fostered widespread questioning of inherited authority—both political and religious.

This ferment produced a variety of new religious movements and philosophical schools, among them the Śramaṇa traditions, which included Buddhism, Jainism, and Ajivikism. The more mystical teachings of the Upaniṣads were also gaining traction, challenging the ritual orthodoxy of the Brahman elite with introspective and experiential approaches to liberation. Criticism of Brahmanical privilege and the authority of the Vedas became increasingly common.

The political landscape was equally dynamic. The Indian subcontinent at this time was divided into sixteen great states, ranging from Gandhāra and Kamboja in the northwest to Magadha and Anga in the east. These polities included hereditary monarchies, oligarchies, and even quasi-republics such as the Licchavis and the Buddha's own Śākya clan. Political instability was common, marked by wars of succession, assassinations, and inter-state conflict. The Buddha himself lived to see the destruction of his homeland by King Viḍūḍabha of Kosala, a traumatic event remembered in the Pāli Canon.

Life for many was precarious. The rise of centralized kingdoms brought increased taxation and state control, often falling hardest on small farmers and the rural poor. Brigandage and lawlessness plagued the roads and forests. Yet alongside this insecurity, economic life was thriving. Artisan guilds flourished, labor became increasingly specialized, and urban centres such as Vārāṇasī and Rājagaha grew in importance. The emergence of a wealthy mercantile class disrupted traditional social structures and eroded the ideological monopoly of the Brahmans.

Women's status, particularly that of widows, was often dire. Legal and social constraints severely limited their autonomy. Denied the right to inherit property or remarry, many women were forced into prostitution as a means of survival. It is in this context that the early Buddhist community's relative tolerance of prostitution may be understood—not as approval, but as a pragmatic accommodation to social realities rejected by orthodox Brahmanism.

This period corresponds to what the German philosopher Karl Jaspers termed the Axial Age, spanning from roughly 800 to 200 BCE—a time when parallel revolutions in thought arose independently across several ancient civilizations, including Confucianism and Taoism in China, Greek philosophy, Hebrew monotheism, and the Iranian teachings of Zoroaster. The historian of philosophy Eric Voegelin referred to it as the Great Leap of Being—a shift toward reflective consciousness and transcendental ethics.

Interestingly, the midpoint of the Axial Age (circa 500 BCE) falls almost exactly between the mythical start of the Kali Yuga (3102 BCE) and the projected future culmination of the current age. The idea of historical cycles recurs in Indian thought, and some esoteric traditions have linked the 21st century to the dawn of a new spiritual epoch. The Kalachakra Tantra, for example, predicts the full manifestation of Shambhala in the year 2424 CE, which some interpret as a kind of second Axial turning.

Modern futurists have offered secular parallels. Ray Kurzweil has proposed the year 2045 as the date of the Technological Singularity—a predicted moment when artificial intelligence will surpass human intelligence by a factor of one billion, triggering an unpredictable transformation of civilization (Kurzweil posits 2029 as the date when machine intelligence will equal human intelligence). Intriguingly, this lies not far from the end of the Mayan Long Count in 2012 CE, whose starting

point (3114 BCE) is within a decade of the traditional Indian date for the beginning of the Kali Yuga. Such resonances—though speculative—suggest that both ancient and modern thinkers have sensed a deep structure in time, marked by periodic inflection points.

The Buddha, situated near the centre of the first Axial Age, appears as a paradigmatic figure of spiritual transformation. Likewise, the 8th-century tantric master Padmasambhava, credited with transmitting Vajrayāna Buddhism to Tibet, may be seen as a midpoint between the Buddha's time and our own, standing at the hinge of two epochs in the unfolding Buddhist vision of time.

THE VIEW OF WOMEN IN THE SHAKTI, SAMANA, AND SHAIVITE COUNTERCULTURES

Shaktism

A famous motif found on a seal excavated at Mohenjo-Daro, one of the principal sites of the Indus Valley Civilization, depicts a horned figure seated in a cross-legged posture and surrounded by animals. This figure has been tentatively identified by some scholars as a proto-form of Shiva in his aspect as Pashupati, "Lord of Animals." The interpretation is speculative but compelling, especially in light of parallels with later Hindu iconography. Similarly, certain phallic objects discovered at Harappan sites have been interpreted by some as precursors of the Shivalingam, though this too remains controversial among archaeologists.

The broader significance of these finds lies in the possible evidence for early fertility cults or symbolic systems that later evolved into Śaiva and Śākta traditions. In classical Shaivism, Shiva represents the eternal masculine principle—creative, ascetic, and ultimately transcendent. Yet, in this tradition, Shiva is said to be inert without Shakti, his consort and the personification of divine energy (śakti meaning "power" or "force"). Shakti embodies the dynamic, creative, and transformative aspect of the cosmos. In the human sphere, she is also associated with intelligence, compassion, and the spiritual force that drives liberation.

Even if the identification of the horned Indus figure with Shiva remains unproven, the goddess principle is well-attested in Vedic literature. Various goddesses such as Aditi, Uṣas, Prithvi, and Sarasvati appear throughout the Rigveda, often embodying cosmic and moral order,

fertility, and wisdom. While the systematic theology of Shaktism emerged more fully by the Gupta period (circa 400 CE), its roots can be traced to earlier Vedic and pre-Vedic expressions of divine femininity. How far back this extends is still unknown, though some scholars suggest connections with prehistoric fertility cults attested in Paleolithic and Neolithic artifacts.

S(h)amanism

By the 5th and 6th centuries BCE, the established Vedic Brahman orthodoxy was increasingly unable to meet the spiritual and existential needs of many in Indian society. A widespread sense of disillusionment, intellectual ferment, and moral questioning had taken hold. In response, a variety of new religious and philosophical movements arose, competing for followers and legitimacy. These movements included materialist, hedonist, deterministic, and agnostic schools of thought, alongside evolving forms of Upanishadic Brahmanism and a growing community of religious renunciants.

By the time of the Buddha, this counterculture—a loosely affiliated milieu of wandering ascetics, seekers, and philosophers—was already well established, especially in the northeastern regions of the subcontinent, where Brahmanical influence was relatively weak. When Siddhattha Gotama renounced the household life at the age of 29, he joined this world of seekers, shaving his head and donning the ochre robe. This act marked his entrance into a spiritual landscape not yet defined by formal monastic institutions, but rather by itinerant practice and personal discipline.

The Pali word samana, from Sanskrit śramaṇa, refers to a renunciant or spiritual striver—literally "one who exerts." It derives from the root √śram, meaning to labor, strive, or become weary, especially in a religious context. While it is not etymologically related to the Tungusic word shaman, both denote individuals engaged in altered states and spiritual disciplines. The Sanskrit prefix sam- (as in samādhi) means "together" or "complete" and is unrelated to śramaṇa. Nonetheless, Buddhist texts do portray spiritual practice with vivid imagery of heat, fire, and light—echoing ideas of inner transformation and the development of psychic powers, which align symbolically with the strenuous exertions of an ascetic on the path to awakening.

The ascetic counterculture rejected the authority of Brahmanism and the Vedas, although many of the spiritual and religious concepts of the ascetics were also prefigured in the Upanishads. It is important to note that the ascetic movement specifically rejected the authority of both the Brahman caste and the Vedic textual traditions, despite these similarities. Thus, the philosophy of the Buddha must be decisively distinguished from the so-called orthodox schools, which accepted Vedic authority. The latter became the well-known Samkhya, Yoga, and Vedanta philosophical schools of orthodox Hinduism, amongst others. This is a key point to remember in the context of the late Vedic attitude toward and treatment of women.

The ascetics set out to discover the truth for themselves experientially. To this end, they adopted three fundamental practices: austerity, to purify karma; meditation, to cultivate mental concentration; and 'view' or philosophy, to cultivate wisdom or understanding – the same threefold division we find in the Pali Canon. Jainism likely predates the Buddha, though in what form is debated. According to Jain tradition, the 23rd Tirthankara, Parshva, lived around the 8th century BCE, placing the tradition's roots at least a century or two before the Buddha's time. However, Jainism as it is known today was largely shaped by Mahavira, a contemporary of the Buddha. Some scholars have speculated that Jainism preserves elements of non-Vedic or pre-Aryan religious culture, possibly even remnants of the Indus Valley Civilization, though this is contested and remains unproven. While Jainism and Buddhism share many features—such as renunciation, moral causality, rebirth, and liberation—the Buddha explicitly criticized Mahavira's teachings, especially extreme asceticism and belief in an eternal soul, and distinguished his own path as a Middle Way. After his renunciation, the Buddha sought out two leading meditation teachers of his time: Āḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta. Under Āḷāra, he mastered the attainment of the sphere of Nothingness, and under Uddaka, who represented the teachings of the sage Rāma, he attained the even subtler state of Neither-perception-nor-non-perception. Although both teachers recognized his mastery, the Bodhisattva concluded that these attainments, while profound, did not lead to full liberation. There is no evidence that either teacher was affiliated with Sāṃkhya or Jain traditions; their teachings appear to reflect early meditative systems preceding formal Buddhist doctrine. Finally, the

Buddha fell in with the Group of Five, led by Kondanna, the Brahman ascetic who had predicted at his birth that Gotama would become a World Teacher. The group of five had renounced the worldly life about the same time as the Buddha and practised extreme austerities, including mortification of the body, breath-control, mind-control, and extreme fasting, practising in cemeteries and elsewhere, similar to the Shaivites (see below). After failing to find what he sought with Kalama and Ramaputta, Gotama joined them in these practices, until he was on the verge of dying. The Buddha's practice of these austerities is vividly described in the Pali Canon. About the age of 35, on the very verge of death, Gotama accepted some milk-rice from a passing village girl, Sujata, at which point the Group of Five abandoned him as having reverted to the effeminate life of his youth. Gotama was on his own and had still not found what he sought.

Shaivism

Shaivism, one of the major currents of Indian religious tradition, can be traced in part to the Śvetāśvatara Upanishad, composed between the 5th and 3rd centuries BCE. This Upanishad is the earliest known text to present Rudra—a Vedic deity later identified with Shiva—as a supreme personal god. Although the Śvetāśvatara Upanishad does not represent fully developed Shaivism, it forms a crucial textual foundation for its later evolution. The historical Buddha's passing is dated around 400 BCE, roughly aligning with the era of this Upanishad, though both dates are subject to scholarly debate.

The origins of Shaivism, however, are significantly older and more complex. Its roots lie in a broad spectrum of ascetic, yogic, and possibly pre-Vedic (or non-Vedic) cultic traditions, which were later assimilated into Brahmanical frameworks. Some scholars suggest links to the Pashupati figure of the Indus Valley Civilization—depicted on a famous seal in a meditative posture surrounded by animals—though this remains speculative and controversial.

Certain Shaivite traditions, particularly the more radical ascetic sects, practiced extreme austerities, cremation ground rituals, the use of human bones in worship, and the rejection of caste norms. These practices were not universal across all Shaiva lineages but were characteristic of sects such as the Kapalikas and later Aghoris. Elements such as yoga, celibacy,

reverence for the feminine principle (Shakti), and renunciation of household life were shared among various renunciate movements in ancient India, including Jainism and early Buddhism.

During his renunciant period, prior to awakening, Gotama Buddha undertook severe austerities, including prolonged fasting, breath control, and absorption in the formless meditative attainments. He also practised cemetery-dwelling, sleeping on beds made of human bones and using a skeleton as a seat, according to early sources such as the Paṭisambhidāmagga. In the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta and other discourses, he explicitly advocated charnel ground meditation, including contemplation of corpses in various stages of decomposition, as a method for transcending attachment to the body and overcoming fear of death. These practices, far from peripheral, formed part of a disciplined spiritual confrontation with impermanence and revulsion, foundational to early Buddhist training. This austere and uncompromising path closely parallels certain Shaivite and proto-Tantric disciplines, which also embraced cremation ground ritual, confrontation with death, and the transgression of orthodox caste and purity codes.

In his teachings, the Buddha challenged the authority of the Brahman caste, opened the order to women, and welcomed those of all social classes. His dharma reflects a return to a primordial spiritual ethos, unmediated by Vedic ritualism and caste exclusivity. He portrayed his teaching as timeless and ancient, yet distinct from both the Brahmanical orthodoxy and the heterodox doctrines of his contemporaries.

In the Angulimāla Sutta, the Buddha converts a violent outlaw whose spiritual background remains ambiguous. Scholar Richard Gombrich has speculated that Angulimāla may have been associated with a fringe ascetic or cremation-ground cult, perhaps akin to early Śaiva or proto-Tantric groups. If so, the Buddha's personal acceptance of Angulimāla as a disciple can be seen as an emblematic act of spiritual inclusion, transformative redemption, and doctrinal contrast.

EVALUATING THE BUDDHA'S VIEW TOWARD AND TREATMENT OF WOMEN

The Sex Life of the Buddha

Unlike Jesus, generally portrayed in Christian canonical sources as celibate and ascetic, the Buddha is depicted in Indian Buddhist literature as embodying an ideal of robust masculinity. John Powers, in his book A Bull of a Man: Images of Masculinity, Sex, and the Body in Indian Buddhism, explores this portrayal, highlighting how the Buddha's physical and virile attributes align with Indian ideals of a "great man."

According to traditional accounts, at his birth, the Buddha exhibited the 32 major physical characteristics of a great man, including long, slender fingers; smooth, golden-colored skin; a well-proportioned body; even white teeth; a strong jaw; long eyelashes; deep blue eyes; a prominent cranium; and a deep, resonant voice . These features signified his potential to become either a universal monarch or a fully enlightened Buddha.

Raised in luxury by his father, Suddhodana, who hoped his son would succeed him as leader of the Shakyan clan, Siddhartha (Gotama) was provided with every sensual pleasure. He married Yasodhara at 16 and had a son, Rahula, by the age of 29. The Magandiya Sutta (MN 75) records the Buddha reflecting on his past indulgence in sensual pleasures:

Magandiya, formerly when I lived the home life, I enjoyed myself, provided and endowed with the five cords of sensual pleasure: with forms cognizable by the eye... sounds cognizable by the ear... odours cognizable by the nose... flavors cognizable by the tongue... tangibles cognizable by the body that are wished for, desired, agreeable, and likable, connected with sensual desire and provocative of lust.

This acknowledgment underscores that the Buddha's renunciation was not born from ignorance of worldly pleasures but from a profound understanding of their transient nature. His departure from palace life marked a deliberate shift from sensual indulgence to spiritual pursuit, embodying the transition from worldly attachment to enlightened detachment.

Negative Views of Women in the Pali Canon

The Pali Canon contains numerous passages that reflect deeply negative and misogynistic attitudes toward women, consistent with the patriarchal social context of ancient India. For example, some texts assert that a

woman is incapable of attaining Buddhahood, presenting female birth as karmically inferior due to five specific types of suffering to which women alone are subject: separation from family, menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and subordination to men.

The Vinaya and sutta literature describe a hierarchical relationship in which a wife is expected to obey her husband unquestioningly, even to the point of self-sacrifice. Similarly, the female monastic is institutionally subordinate to the male monastic, regardless of seniority or spiritual attainment.

Sexual activity is portrayed in starkly negative terms. The Buddha is reported to have described sexual intercourse as the "opposite of the Dhamma," something impure and to be conducted in secret. Some Vinaya texts contain hyperbolic warnings against sexual misconduct, including metaphors suggesting that sexual union with a woman is worse than contact with venomous snakes or burning coals—expressions designed to emphasize renunciation rather than literal prescriptions.

Regarding women's capacity to arouse desire, the texts often depict the female form as a powerful temptation and liken women to "sharks" or "snares of Māra" (the personification of delusion and temptation). The Anguttara Nikaya records the Buddha cautioning monks to avoid women altogether, even dead ones, to prevent lust and spiritual distraction.

Women are further described as possessing negative qualities such as envy, miserliness, sensuality, and secretiveness, which purportedly limit their ability to participate in leadership, commerce, or travel alone. These descriptions reflect social prejudices rather than spiritual truths, as evidenced by the Buddha's contradictory actions in admitting women to the monastic order and teaching them the path to liberation.

The Buddha's own attitude toward women is complex and at times contradictory. While he acknowledges the challenges posed by sensual desire and social roles, he also provides a radical platform for female spiritual attainment—albeit within a framework still shaped by the patriarchal norms of his time.

These texts must be understood in their historical and cultural context, recognizing both the limitations of ancient Indian society and the Buddha's often progressive challenges to social convention. The Pali Canon's sometimes harsh language about women reflects not only

spiritual concerns about desire and attachment but also the social realities of a deeply gendered culture.

According to the Pali Canon, the original sangha of the Buddha was a sangha of men only. After the death of the his father, King Suddhodana, about 7 or 8 years following the Buddha's enlightenment and the establishment of the sangha (perhaps ca. 440 BCE) the Buddha's aunt and foster-mother, Maha Pajapti Gotami, resolves to be ordained, along with 500 women of the court. She approaches the Buddha when he is visiting Kapilavastu, for permission to join the sangha, but he refuses her request. Distraught, the women shave their heads and put on robes anyway, and follow the Buddha to Vesali, a distance of about 300 km (186 miles). This must have taken about two months, perhaps longer. Distraught and physically exhausted, she approaches Ananda, who is portrayed in the suttas as quite sympathetic to women in general, to intercede with the Buddha. Ananda approaches the Buddha on her behalf. Once again, the Buddha refuses. Ananda's subsequent discussion with the Buddha is quite famous. He asks the Buddha whether, therefore, women are capable of emancipation. The Buddha admits that they are capable of emancipation, the same as men. The self-contradiction in the Buddha's position thus exposed, the Buddha finally relents, acceding to Ananda's request, but he declares that because of the ordination of women the longevity of the sangha will be halved, from 1,000 to only 500 years. Moreover, he imposes eight special rules on the bhikkhunisangha that permanently subordinates them to the bhikkhusangha. These are called the eight Garudhammas, viz.:

1. A nun who has been ordained even for a 100 years must greet respectfully, rise up from her seat, salute with joined palms, and do proper homage to a monk ordained but one day.
2. A nun must not spend the rains in a residence where there are no monks.
3. Every half month a nun should desire two things from the Order of Monks: the asking as to the date of the Observance [uposatha] day, and the coming for the exhortation [bhikkhunovada].
4. After the three-month rainy season retreat a nun must 'invite' [pavarana] before both orders in respect of three matters, namely what was seen, what was heard, what was suspected.

5. A nun, offending against an important rule, must undergo manatta [discipline or penance] for half a month before both orders.
6. When, as a probationer, she has trained in the six rules [cha dhamma] for 2 years, she should seek higher ordination from both orders.
7. A monk must not be abused or reviled in any way by a nun.
8. Admonition of monks by nuns is forbidden.

Over the course of time, these eight additional rules expanded to 311 rules for nuns, compared to 227 for monks. According to another computation, there are 110 extra rules for nuns. After 1,000 years, the bhikkhunisangha died out in India and most other places. In Thailand, which follows the conservative Theravada tradition inherited from Sri Lanka, it is actually illegal for a woman to "impersonate" a monastic by wearing robes.[106]

There are many rules in the Buddhist Vinaya, the monastic rules applicable to monks, concerning women and nuns. A monk may not have sexual intercourse or lustful bodily contact with a woman, nor may he make lustful remarks to a woman, including asking her for sexual favours, nor may he act as a go between. A nun may not wash, dye, or card raw wool for a monk. A monk may not lie down in the same building as a woman. He may not teach a woman more than five or six lines of dharma, unless another knowledgeable man is present. He may not exhort the nuns in the nuns' quarters unless she is ill. He may not exhort the nuns for worldly gain in any case. He may not give an unrelated nun cloth for a robe, or sew it or have it sewn, unless it is given in exchange. A monk may not travel on the road with a nun, even between villages, unless it is by caravan and the road is unsafe, or travel with a nun by boat in any direction upstream or downstream other than directly crossing a river. He may not travel on a road with a woman in any case. He may not eat alms food obtained by the prompting of a nun. He may not sit alone with a nun.

[106] Banning Ajahn Brahm's speech on bhikkuni ordination from the 11th United Nations Day of Vesak 2014 is merely the most recent confirmation of the misogyny of Theravada Buddhism. See "Banning Ajahn Brahm's speech on nuns was a spectacular own-goal." Note that restoring bhikkuni ordination does not restore gender equity between men and women, since the Buddhist formula of ordination for bhikkunis is inherently and intentionally discriminatory.

He may not accept food from an unrelated nun. The punishment for violating any of these rules ranges from expulsion from the order to confession, depending on the severity of the offence.

Positive Views of Women in the Pali Canon

Despite the views summarized above, the Buddha also expresses many positive views concerning women in various places. Women figure prominently in both the suttas and the post-canonical commentaries (see Hellmuth Hecker, "Great Women Disciples of the Buddha," chapter 7 of Nyanaponika and Hecker). I have already mentioned the Buddha's acknowledgement that women are capable of attaining arhantship. This is elaborated at great length in other suttas, where the Buddha goes to some length to describe all of the levels of attainment from faith follower to arhant, and emphasizes that many members of the sangha, including both men and women, have attained all of the various stages of spiritual development. Indeed, the Buddha implies that women must exist at all levels of spiritual development for the sangha to be complete. The Buddha criticizes the Brahman practice of arranged marriage and defends the right of women to marry freely for love. He explicitly identifies women's rights as the fifth principle of a healthy and stable society, referring specifically to the Vajjians. When the married Bhagga householders Nakulapita and Nakulmata approach the Buddha and declare their love for each other, asking him whether they can ensure that they would be reborn together, rather than admonish them the Buddha praises the couple and declares that they can be reborn together as deva beings, a destination reserved for the most pious, if they observe the same faith, morality, generosity, and wisdom. The evidence of the Pali Canon, especially the *Songs of the Wise Women (Therigatha),* clearly shows that the early sangha included many women, both monastic and lay, many of whom were highly esteemed and spiritually advanced, even arhants, just as was the case during the early Vedic period. Some great women disciples of the Buddha included Visakha, the Buddha's chief patroness; Mallika; Khema of great wisdom; Bhadda Kundalakesa, the debating ascetic; Kisagotami; Sona; Nanda, the Buddha's half-sister; Queen Samavati, the embodiment of compassion; Patacara, preserver of the Vinaya; Ambapali, the generous courtesan;

Sirima; Uttara; and Isidasi. This is perhaps the best evidence of all for the view that the Buddha made no distinction between women and men.[107]

Analysis

In the introduction to his translation of the Numerical Discourses of the Buddha (Anguttara Nikaya), Bhikhhu Bodhi acknowledges that the positive and negative statements concerning women found throughout the Pali Canon are mutually self-contradictory. It is impossible to believe that the Buddha held all these views simultaneously. Bodhi also doubts the historicity of the famous dialogue in which Ananda convinces the Buddha to admit women to the sangha, citing "anachronisms hard to reconcile with other chronological information in the canon and commentaries." Scholars also doubt the antiquity of the garudhammas, one of which refers to probationary nuns, a category that did not exist when Mahapajapati was ordained. Consequently, it cannot be original. There is also reason to disbelieve the account of the admission of Mahapajapati to the sangha, since the Exposition of Offerings (Dakkhinavibhangha Sutta) in the Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha (Majjhima Nikaya) presents the Bhikkunisangha as already existing when Mahapajapati goes for refuge to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, without any suggestion that the Buddha opposed her admission. It appears, then, that this whole complex was invented to justify the garudhammas.

In defence of the Buddha's purported reluctance to ordain women, apologists have cited possible concerns about social prejudice, including

[107] Although most suttas are addressed to bhikkus, there are also suttas spoken by or to bhikkunis, and the *Therigatha* is composed entirely of verses written by early bhikkunis. The first sutta attributed to a bhikkuni is the *Culavedalla Sutta* (MN 44), attributed to Dhammadinna, declared by the Buddha to be the nun foremost in expounding the dharma. In this sutta, she expounds the dharma concerning personality, personality view, the Noble Eightfold Path, concentration, formations, the attainment of cessation, feeling, underlying tendencies, and counterparts. In the *Dakkhinavibhanga Sutta* (MN 142), his aunt, Mahapajapati Gotami, presents the Buddha with robes that she made for him herself. And in the *Nadakovada Sutta* (MN 146), Mahapajapati Gotami asks the Buddha to teach the bhikkunis. The small number of "bhikkhuni suttas" contrasted with the frequent references to the bhikkunis throughout the Pali Canon suggests a deliberate suppression of suttas in which bhikkunis were featured prominently, presumably due to the obvious gender bias of the First Buddhist Council. The insights of these "wise women" have been lost forever.

the Buddha's realization that the sangha could not survive without popular support, and the safety of the nuns, who would be subjected not only to social scorn and even abuse, but also by the ravages of the environment at a time when the sangha had not yet established itself with parks and monasteries. By accepting women into the sangha, the Buddha was setting himself against the entire late Vedic tradition of the deva worshippers that was now universally accepted by the society of his time. It was unheard of for women to leave the household life and follow the path of a samana, much as it was in Hindu India until very recently. Although he was criticized for breaking up the family unit, and the sangha was not welcomed everywhere, it is a testament to the Buddha's charisma and the respect in which he was held that there is not more indication of dissension in the Pali Canon than there is.

Thus, the Pali Canon itself forces us to make a judgment. Either we accept that the Buddha reluctantly admitted women to the sangha on what amounts to a technicality, but instituted rules to curtail and limit the damage resulting from this concession, or we take the view that the misogynistic passages are later additions that reflect the social prejudices of 5th century BCE India, especially male monastics, that we have seen began to supplant the older, more tolerant view of women during the late Vedic period. The latter view is consistent with the Buddha's declaration that he considered the Brahmanism of his time to be a degenerate remnant of a primordial tradition that he sought to restore. With respect to the latter, it is interesting to note that the Buddha clearly opposed the caste system, arranged marriage, and authoritarianism, all things that appeared during the late Vedic period with the rise of the newer deva worshippers who cast down the asuras to the foot of Mount Meru. Psychologically, this sounds like a massive act of self-inflicted psychosocial repression. This makes one wonder if the older tradition to which the Buddha alludes was in fact that of the older system of asura worship, with which he was in secret sympathy, which also, like the Buddha, opposed the Vedas and the gods (devas), i.e., Aryanism, despite the reversal of terms that clearly predominates in the Pali Canon itself.

THE VIEW OF WOMEN IN THE EARLY BUDDHIST COUNCILS

The First Buddhist Council

The First Buddhist Council was convened in the year following the Buddha's passing (parinirvana) (about 400 BCE according to modern scholarship) by King Ajatashatru, the king of Magadha in Rajgir, the capital, according to tradition. Although in his final instructions the Buddha had said that the sangha should have no leader after him, but should be led by the dharma alone, Mahakassapa, the Buddha's foremost disciple in ascetic practices, assumed the leadership of the sangha after the Buddha's death, and called the First Buddhist Council together in response to suggestions by the monk Subhadda that with the Buddha's death the Vinaya rules of the order might be relaxed. Although this is presented in the Theravadin literature as a criticism, in fact according to the Great Passing (Mahanirvana Sutta), the Buddha had indicated that after his death the lesser and minor rules of the Vinaya might be abolished. Thus, Mahakassapa convened 500 arhants to consolidate the tradition of the dharma, including Ananda, who conveniently attained arhantship during the night before the council began to meet from July to the following January. Upali, the foremost disciple in keeping the precepts, began by reciting the complete rules of the Vinaya, especially the parajika – the rules that entail mandatory and automatic expulsion from the sangha – i.e., sex, stealing, killing, and lying about one's spiritual attainment. Ananda then recited the suttas.

Ananda had a hard time of it, however. He was severely criticized, presumably by Mahakassapa, for "convincing" the Buddha to ordain women. Many male arhants were extremely opposed to this, despite the clear fact that the Buddha had approved it. There was also the question of the minor and lesser rules of the Vinaya that the Buddha had said in his final instructions to Ananda might be abolished. Since it had not occurred to Ananda to ask the Buddha which rules he was referring to, the conservative Council decided to keep them all. The Council also decided to allow the ordination of women, subject to the eight garudhammas and expanded the rules to include an additional 110 rules for nuns, despite the fact that the Buddha had also declared that no new rules were to be made. It seems likely that the eight garudhammas were codified at this time, perhaps as a compromise between two competing factions.

The foregoing account creates serious "theological" issues for the Hinayana in general and the Theravada in particular, since all of the members of the First Buddhist Council are regarded as arhants. This problem came to a head a 100 years later during the Second Buddhist Council, during which the fallibility and imperfection of arhants became a bone of contention between two nascent Buddhist schools, the Mahasamghikas, who took the view that arhants are fallible, and the Sthaviras, who took the view that arhants are infallible. These differences were summarized in the Five Points of Mahadeva. The Mahasamghikas represented the majority view, and subsequently developed into the Mahayana, whereas the minority, the Sthaviras, subsequently developed into what is now called the Theravada. With respect to the present topic, it is clear that the First Buddhist Council endorsed a view of women and nuns that is fundamentally misogynistic, and the Pali Canon, which is the record of Buddhist teachings accepted by the Theravada, is explicitly so. As I have also shown, the First Buddhist Council overruled the Buddha's own injunctions to not appoint a leader, to abolish the lesser and minor rules, and subsequent councils clearly also added rules and in particular rules designed to subordinate the nuns to the monks. That the attainments of arhantship and Buddhahood are different also seems to be supported by the canonical assertion, if we accept it, that women can become arhants but not Buddhas. The ten powers of an arhant also differ significantly from the ten powers of a buddha according to the Pali texts. Per contra, if we accept the Hinayana/Theravada view that arhants are infallible, then we must accept Buddhist misogyny as a view. If we are not willing to accept the inferiority of women, we cannot in good conscience accept the lineage derived from the minority Sthavira position. Therefore, we cannot accept Hinayana or Theravada as the final summation of dharma. Since the Buddha indicated that in the absence of consensus we must accept majority rule, we are compelled to the alternative view as the correct dharmic view.

THE VIEW OF WOMEN IN BUDDHISM TODAY

After the Buddha's death about 400 BCE, Indian society continued to suppress women. Beginning in the 5th century CE, by the 11th century the practice of sati, or widow-burning, became the model of how a pious wife should respond to the death of her husband. The Muslim incursion into

India (12th–16th centuries), which virtually wiped Buddhism out of India, including the bhikkunisangha, followed by the British conquest of India, beginning in the 17th century, further intensified the already deeply-rooted Indian misogyny. Meanwhile, the bhikkunisangha had virtually disappeared from India and Sri Lanka by the 11th century. Widely disparaged in Buddhist countries, and discriminated against where it did exist, the Bhikkunisangha only survived continuously in Eastern (Chinese) Buddhism, ironically in view of Confucian ideas of the subordination of women. Today efforts are underway in several countries to restore the bhikkunisangha, albeit based on the old model; the Dalai Lama has made similar efforts in northeast India. As a result, there are as many as 130,000 Buddhist nuns in the world today.

Socially, Buddhist women have fared better than Indian women, however. In general, Buddhist societies respect single women, including spinsters, divorced women, and widows. Laws concerning divorce and the division of property and children are fairly equal between husband and wife. Outside China, where Confucian notions predominate, women are fairly free, including in business, trade, and agriculture. Even in Eastern Buddhism, however, Zen/Ch'an Buddhism emphasizes sexual equality. Women may also be found exercising the professions of law and medicine, and have been politically influential. Many Buddhist women enjoy sexual freedom, property rights, and self-determination. Women may also be influential in religious institutions. Mahayana tends to view men and women as equal whereas Theravada still sees the Bodhisattva path as suited only for rare and heroic men. Female spiritual figures are most widespread in Vajrayana (Tantra).

CONCLUSION

Indian culture differs from the other great originating cultures of humanity in that most cultures begin with the patriarchal suppression of women, followed by their progressive emancipation, whereas Indian civilization began with women holding a position of unique power and privilege, followed by their progressive suppression commencing about 1100 BCE. This "transvaluation of all values" appears to have coincided with a social schism in which an original cult of asura worship, great cosmological abstractions associated with the powers of nature, was displaced by a new, aggressive cult of deva worship based on notions of

patriarchal authority, the status quo, Brahmanic dominance, caste, and misogyny derived from the Aryan incursion. By the time of the Buddha, Vedic society was breaking down and a counterculture of wandering "shamans," suggestive of the later Shakti and Shaiva cults that eventually developed into Tantra, had emerged. After studying meditative or cognitive (jhana) yoga with Brahman and Jain teachers in succession, the Buddha joined the samanas and became an extreme ascetic for a number of years, almost dying in the process, followed by his enlightenment experience. It is noteworthy that both the Shakti and Shaivite cults were not misogynistic in their attitudes to the female principle. The conflicting attitudes toward men and women in Indian society appear in the Pali Canon in the conflicting attitudes to women attributed to the Buddha. However, it appears that the Buddha did not make a fundamental distinction between men and women, asserting that both men and women are equally capable of attainment, and freely teaching women and admitting them to the sangha on an equal basis, rather like Jesus, the founder of Christianity, for which the latter was also severely criticized by the Jewish establishment in Jerusalem. If the Buddha did make a distinction between the orders of monks and nuns, it was to protect the nuns and appease social prejudice. This unpopularly tolerant attitude must have created a great deal of consternation amongst the more conservative male followers of the Buddha, but they appear to have largely avoided criticism out of respect for the Buddha. This changed after the Buddha's death, when a major rift seems to have occurred during the First Buddhist Council, when the male monastics attacked Ananda for supporting the ordination of women. That they were not the only side of this debate is suggested by the fact that a compromise appears to have been reached in which the order of nuns was subordinated to the order of monks but allowed to exist. Otherwise, it seems likely that the nuns would have been suppressed altogether. The pious forgeries concerning Mahapajapati, Ananda's subsequent debate with the Buddha, and the garudhamma were created to explain the final decision of the First Buddhist Council, which led ultimately to the disappearance of the bhikkunisangha. Moreover, the addition of numerous special rules for nuns, all with the purpose of subordinating the nuns to the monks, clearly violates the Buddha's instructions not to add extra rules to the *Vinaya*. Over the following three centuries numerous misogynistic passages were

introduced into the suttas, while the more favourable statements of the Buddha concerning women were also allowed to stand because they were too well established to be refuted, thus creating the somewhat bizarre self-contradictions that we find in the Pali texts today. Very likely, over the course of 300 years there were diverse currents and sub-currents of thought amongst the anonymous redactors of the Pali Canon itself, of which we know little or nothing. Meanwhile, Indian society continued in its misogynistic course, exacerbated by Muslim and British colonial influence. In contemporary Nepal, for example, we find a significantly more liberal society than India proper, since Nepal was never subjugated to Muslim and British influences. Buddhism itself split into two large movements, one aligned with the dominant conservative social attitude and one aligned with the more liberal attitude that, it appears, was actually advocated by the Buddha. Fortunately, for those of us who do not believe that women are inferior, the latter has become the majority view in the Buddhist world today.

19
Padmasambhava
The Early Texts

PART I – HISTORICAL SECTION

THE OLDEST TEXTS ABOUT PADMASAMBHAVA

Padmasambhava, the 8th century Tantric mystic from Oddiyana in the vicinity of the Swat valley, is credited with converting the Tibetan people to Vajrayana Buddhism. Although many scholars believe that Padmasambhava was a real historical person, the details of his life and teachings have been obscured by centuries of hagiography. Here I will try to get at the details of Padmasambhava's work, by focusing on the four oldest-known texts pertaining to him, including material that may go back to the 9th century, less than 100 years after Padmasambhava's departure from Tibet about 800 CE. These are, in the order in which we will be discussing them:

The Testament of Ba: The Royal Narrative Concerning the Bringing of the Buddha's Doctrine to Tibet, the oldest history of Tibet, which refers to Padmasambhava.

Taranatha's Life of Padmasambhava, properly entitled *The Document Which Clarifies, Possessing a Threefold Reliability*. Taranatha was a renowned sixteenth to 17th century Tibetan scholar who sifted through much older material in order to arrive at the most accurate biography of Padmasamhbava that he could construct, and which

specifically avoids many later hagiographical tales, e.g., the miraculous birth of Padmasambhava in a lotus flower at the age of 8, etc.

A Garland of Views, which is generally accepted as having been composed by Padmasambhava himself.

A Noble Noose of Methods: The Lotus Garland Synopsis, a 10th century Tantra and accompanying commentary, which may have been written by Padmasambhava or is certainly closely related to him.

There are six additional works attributed to Padmasambhava which I have identified but not considered as no English translations of these works exist as far as I know (also see Appendix).

In addition, I have added a chronology of alternative dates for events associated with Padmasamhbava from a variety of sources, which clearly place him in the middle to late 8th century of the common era.

There are of course inconsistencies in the various sources. I have not attempted to smooth these out but have let them stand as they appear in the originals. Nevertheless, one can certainly get a general impression both of Padmasambhava's life and, more importantly, his teachings from these materials.

The Testament of Ba

The Testament of Ba is an old Tibetan account of the establishment of Vajrayana Buddhism in Tibet and the foundation of Samye Monastery during the reign of King Trisong Detsen (r. 755–797/804), attributed to Ba Salnang, who belonged to the king's court. The oldest known versions of the text are dated to the 9th or 10th centuries, relatively close to the time that it describes and includes the oldest historical references to Padmasambhava. Specifically it describes the struggle to establish Buddhism in Tibet; the first and second invitation of Santaraksita (725–788); trips to China in search of the dharma; the Bon-Buddhist debate; the invitation of Padmasambhava, who was forced to leave the country prematurely; the construction of Samye monastery; the Samye doctrinal debate; scriptural translations; and the sorrow and regrets of the old king. Padmasambhava returned to Tibet with Santarakshita on his second visit, accompanied by a Nepalese architect-geomancer. Particularly notable is the relative absence of supernatural elements in the treatment of Padmasambhava, who was expelled from Tibet by the king because he was suspected of threatening the political status quo, possibly related to his

efforts in the area of water engineering, which threatened the local power structures. There is no reference to special teachings or concealed texts, nor does he participate in the establishment of Samye monastery. Nevertheless, he was credited with being adept in mirror divination[108] and referred to as a master of mantra, or mantrayana, a synonym for Vajrayana. due to its extensive use of mantra yoga. These measures were cut short by mounting pressure from the ruling aristocratic establishment that opposed Padmasmabhava. As a result the king asked him to leave, and an assassination attempt was even made against him. Before he left Tibet, Padmasambhava predicted that Tibet would be afflicted by sectarian divisions. This was followed by the Great Samye Debate, as a result of which the king declared that Tibet would follow the gradualist school of Indian Buddhism associated with Nagarjuna rather than the Chinese Mahayana doctrine of sudden enlightenment (subitism). Chinese Buddhism was repressed, which the king apparently regretted at the end of his life. The reign of King Trison Detsen was followed by an "era of fragmentation," during which Tibet fell into anarchy for at least 150 years, beginning in the mid-9th century. According to the Testament of Ba all this occurred before the Buddhist-Bon debate, the construction of Samye monastery, and the Samye debate, suggesting that Padmasambhava left Tibet before 775 CE, when he was between 42 and 57 approximately.

Taranatha's *Life of Padmsambhava*

Taranatha's *Life of Padmasambhava,* properly called "The Document Which Clarifies, Possessing a Threefold Reliability," is the most authoritative biography of Padmasambhava available, written by a prominent lama of the Jonang school of Tibetan Buddhism, who lived between 1575 and 1634. Taranatha himself states that he wrote the *Life* at the age of 36, so it must have been written in or about 1611. Taranatha was reputedly born on the birthday of Padmsambhava, which is celebrated by the Tibetans on the tenth day of the sixth lunar month, corresponding to our June or July. Although it was written more than 800 years after the events it describes, Taranatha was renowned for his scholarship during his lifetime, and he also wrote *History of Buddhism in India.* As he says

[108] Catoptromancy, or divination using a mirror, is an ancient practice used to obtain auguries or gain spiritual insights. By this means Padmasambhava was able to identify local spirits that were hostile to Buddhism and neutralize their negative influences.

himself, he studied numerous oral traditions that were circulating about the life of Padmasambhava, and only accepted those that he found the oldest and most credible. Thus, his book is based on a critical discernment of much older traditions. I have not been able to locate a critical edition of the *Life* in English. Here I have used a popular, self-published English translation, which appears to be reliable despite its absence of a critical apparatus.

Buddhism reached its height in India during the Pala Empire, which originated in Bengal. Its rulers were followers of Mahayana and Tantric Buddhism. It was founded with the election of Gaupala as the emperor of Gauda in 750 CE. The empire reached its peak under Dharmapala (ca. 777–ca. 816) and Devapala (ca. 816–ca. 855). About the same time, King Hayalila ruled Oddiyana,[109] a somewhat mysterious land in the general vicinity of present day Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, commonly associated with the general vicinity of the Swat Valley.

Padmasambhava was the secret initiatory name of the son of a scholar of rhetoric in Oddiyana and a member of the royal family, Srigdhara[110] by name, meaning "one who wears a flower garland." Padmasambhava had at least six marks of a buddha, including a rosy complexion, the figure of a lotus on his ring finger, eyes and lips that looked like lotus flowers, and the figures of an Utpala flower, hook, and lasso on his body, in addition to other marks such as a lotus and a vajra between his eyebrows. Like the Buddha, after his birth the Brahmans examined his birth marks (physiognomy). Some predicted that he would become a king, others a prince, and others that he would live in cemeteries. Everyone agreed that he would be powerful. A visiting yogi predicted that he would become an advanced Tantric practitioner who would receive his power from Amitabha (lit. "Infinite Light"),[111] the Buddha of Immeasurable Light and Life.

As he grew up Padmasambhava studied writing, dialectics, medicine, and handicrafts, and took refuge in a monastery where he took the five

[109] Also spelled Uddayana, Urgyan, Wuchang, and Urkhin. Lit. "royal garden, orchard." Some scholars identify it with the Indian state of Odisha.

[110] Sanskrit, Srado in the language of Oddiyana.

[111] The name "Amitabha" is given the usual Sanskrit interpretation of "Infinite Light." However, Prof. Lokesh Chandra, possibly the foremost expert on Buddhist iconography, states that the name is, in fact, Prakrit and that it means "Light of Amrita." Thanks to Mike Crowley for this information.

basic vows (pansil), studying Abhidharma and Sutra. He was also initiated into inner, secret Tantra by Shantigupta, an acharya or senior teacher or master; into Kriya (lit. "action, deed, effort"); Ubhaya ("binary?"); and Yoga Tantra. Patanjali defines Kriya as consisting of asceticism, study, and devotion. Ubhaya combines ritual and meditation, whereas Yoga focuses on meditation. Padmasambhava studied with a *siddha* (lit. "perfected one") called Sukhadeva, who had achieved self-identity with Avalokiteshvara, the androgynous Buddha of Compassion, and the realization of non-duality. He also studied with a prostitute named Sukhadhari, who embodied Vajradhara (lit "diamond thunderbolt"), the Primordial Buddha.

Padmasambhava's practice of mantra yoga was accompanied by many bad omens, and vivid dreams of many Buddhas and Bodhisattvas all transforming themselves into Amitabha. He also experienced a vision of Hayagriva (lit. "having the neck of a horse"), a wrathful nature spirit associated with Avalokiteshvara, surrounded by a retinue of dakinis, female spirits or demons, and minor spirits, similar to the Buddha's experience with Mara. He also was skilled in politics and astrology.

By this time King Hayalila had died and his position take over by his son, Akshalila, who was also devoted to the dharma. However, one of his scribes and two ministers conspired to take over the country, and convinced the king that Padmasambhava was actually engaged in a plot to take over the country, along with a thousand monks. He was expelled from the country, and wandered for a long time from country to country, meditating in many cemeteries and practicing mantra yoga, experiencing many visions and acquiring siddhis or psychic powers. Thus he became a Vidyadhara (lit. "knowledge or awareness holder"), a master of esoteric knowledge or gnosis. Padmasambhava decided to aspire to Buddhahood itself, but Amitabha appeared to him in a dream and warned him that his use of wrathful and powerful methods (sorcery?) was creating obstacles to his realization of the Absolute.

Padmasambhava went to Magadha, the great Buddhist centre of India, where the Buddha himself lived and taught, which was now being ruled by King Dharmapala, the son of Gopala, and the grandfather of Devapala, under whom Magadha had reached its greatest power. Unfortunately, there are four historical estimates of the reign of Dharmapala, ranging from 770 to 821 CE (fl. ca. 796/7 CE). Since Taranatha states that

Dharmapala had been reigning "for a long time," we can probably estimate that Padmasambhava entered Magadha between 796 and 821 CE approximately, and became a disciple of Shrijnana, the abbot of the monastery of Chokyi Myuku. Srijnana ordained Padmasambhava in the Mahasamghika Buddhist lineage, one of the early Buddhist schools the Vinaya of which is now considered to be the oldest. Many scholars regard the Mahasamghika as the precursor of the Mahayana. There he practised Vinaya and studied the Prajnaparamita (lit. "the Perfection of Transcendent Wisdom"), the oldest Mahayana tradition which originated in about 100 BCE and is older than the Pali Canon.[112] As a result, Padmasambhava's view became like Space. He was also initiated in multiple Tantras, including the Assembly of Secrets, the Net of the Magical Manifestation, the Essence of the Secret Moon, the Tantra of the Unification of the Buddhas and the Garland of Actions, as well as the five classes of Inner Tantra, reaching the Absolute. Padmasambhava is regarded as a Second Buddha, like Nagarjuna, Asanga, Je Tsongkhapa, and Nichiren.

Shrijnana sent Padmasambhava east to the country of Bhangala (Bengal?) to meditate on the Heruka, enlightened beings in Vajrayana Buddhism that adopt a fierce countenance to benefit sentient beings, also called Wisdom Kings, representing the embodiment of indivisible bliss and emptiness. Here he found a consort (sexual yoga?) where they trained in the union of creative visualization and inner mandala (lit. "universe"), during which he experienced visions of many Buddhas. He realized the supreme Mahamudra (lit. "the Great Seal"), the realization of the inseparable unity of wisdom and emptiness. He manifested the Vajra or subtle body, a.k.a. the Body of Light.

As a result of these varied attainments Padmasambhava formulated bodhicitta, the will to help all suffering sentient beings through the attainment of an enlightened mind. Padmasambhava taught the dharma in northern India and Nepal for several years. He travelled to Bodhgaya, where the Buddha was enlightened, to establish a meditation place, opposing spiritualism and establishing the Buddhadharma, taking a yogini called Ngentsulchen as his consort. He also appointed a yogi named Ratnashila as his personal attendant. Both of these realized themselves as

[112] Ca. 29–17 BCE? (Some authorities now date the writing of the Pali Canon earlier in the 1st century BCE.)

vidyadharas. Finally, he returned to Oddiyana, where together with other disciples they built a temple. However, although there were many Buddhists the area was beginning to be overrun by Muslim armies who were destroying or conquering Buddhist schools.

Padmasambhava's fame spread far and wide, especially in India and in Tibet. He had many disciples who achieved sungjug,[113] a state of primordial unity that resolves dualities. He also travelled to Mount Kailash, identified by Buddhists with Mount Meru, the central axis of the world.

King Trisong Detsen, who ruled from 755 to 797 or 804, invited Shantigosha (= Santaraksita, 725–788) to come to Tibet to teach the dharma. About the same time Tibet was afflicted by a series of natural disasters, which the people regarded as ominous. Santarasita advised the king to invite Padmasambhava to also come to Tibet, who was at that time in Nepal. Padmasambhava travelled to Tibet accompanied by a Nepalese stone sculptor and an expert in the construction of temples. During the course of this notoriously difficult transit Padmasambhava overcame many obstacles, including meditating in a cave, finally arriving at Lasho (Lhasa?). When he met the king, he refused to prostrate, but the king spontaneously prostrated before Padmasambhava. Padmasambhava travelled throughout Tibet, overcoming the resistance of the traditional Bon establishment and converting many people to Buddhism.

Padmasambhava initiated the king and a select few into Kriya Tantra and the Inner Tantras, explaining to them *A Garland of Views of the Secret Methods, the Vajra that Tames Everything, the Hundred Thousand Series of Purba,* and other methods for realization. Although Padmasambhava wished to remain in Tibet for a long time, the negative karma of posterity (?) and the opposition of the aristocracy forced him to leave Tibet before he wished. Dr. Herbert Guenther has suggested that this was due to the prejudice against foreigners that followed the Great Samye debate (792–794) between Indian monastics from Nalanda, especially Kamalasila representing Vajrayana, and the East Mountain Teaching of Chan Buddhism, represented by Moheyan from the Tang Imperial Court. The

[113] Sic. Properly, zung 'jug. This is the esoteric process of yuganaddha, which occurs in the cranial cakra called sunyacakra, the cakra of Voidness, equivalent to the Hindu tantric visualization of the union of Siva and Shakti, male and female. See Agehananda Bharati, *The Tantric Tradition*, 254, 265, 271 n. 29, 277 n. 74, 294. Thanks to Sean Hillman for assistance with identifying the Tibetan orthography.

debate focused on the question of whether enlightenment was gradual or sudden respectively. Padmasambhava's philosophy of Dzogchen is a sudden enlightenment tradition, and as such would have been associated with Chan. As a result, many Chinese and other foreigners were expelled.

As Padmasambhava was teaching the king, two of his queens asked to become consorts of the mandala offering, a symbolic offering of the entire universe to the dharma. However, Padmasambhava preferred two other queens who lived far away. Similarly to what had happened in Oddiyana, some ministers of the court put it about that Padmasambhava wanted to steal the wealth of Tibet and hand it over to India. Padmasambhava is also reputed to have made the land of Tibet fertile by installing various sorts of waterworks, something that he had done in the past, resulting in his reputation as a "water diviner." The ministers falsely told the king that Padmasambhava intended to leave Tibet and return to India, whereupon the king gave Padmasambhava a handful of gold dust as a parting gift. Padmasambhava promised to give some of the gold dust as an offering at Bodhgaya, and returned the rest.

Because of these events, Padmasambhava was unable to finish explaining the teaching of *A Garland of Views of the Secret Methods,* but he taught many mantras of wrathful actions to his disciples and concealed many others in the earth, together with many texts, known as treasure teachings, in different countries, in total numbering 108, which is a symbolically significant number in Buddhism. He also declared that those who sacrifice the ego may enjoy the fruit of the Great Vehicle (Yana) of Yoga in the pure land of Ogmin (lit. "not being under"), referring to the Pure Land of the Buddha. After providing individual spiritual advice to his disciples personally, he departed, accompanied by two loyal ministers on horseback. He declared that because he was unable to complete his work in Tibet there would be great strife and the teachings would go through a period of decline. This refers to the so-called "era of fragmentation," a period that extended from the mid-9th century to the early 11th century, during which much of the Tibetan historical record was obliterated during a period of civil war accompanied by the collapse of the Tibetan state.[114] Padmasambhava then declared that he would travel to the southwestern

[114] Cantwell and Mayer, *A Noble Noose of Methods, the Lotus Garland Synopsis,* 6. Wikipedia refers to the era of fragmentation which extended from 842 to 1253. Thus, Padmasambhava must have left Tibet before 842 at the latest.

border between Tibet and India, leaving the country in the vicinity of a mountain near DongbabTrang (?), most likely in the vicinity of present-day Bhutan.

After the departure of Padmasambhava, the king invited Vimalamitra and Shantigarbha to teach him the dharma that he had not yet heard from Padmasambhava. According to Taranatha, before he departed Padmsambhava had empowered the Aryapalo Temple and consecrated the ground of Chokor Samye, which the Testament of Ba states was built between 763 or 775 and 779. In conclusion, Taranatha suggests that Padmasambhava remained in Tibet for a total of just eighteen months.

PART II – PHILOSOPHICAL SECTION, 1

A GARLAND OF VIEWS AND THE NINE YANAS

Padmasambhava is recognized in Tibet as an emanation – not a reincarnation or rebirth – of Siddhartha Gautama (ca. 477–ca. 397 BCE), the historical Buddha. *A Garland of Views* is unique among Padmasambhava's teachings in that it was handed down by oral tradition directly from Padmasambhava, unlike the terma ("treasure") teachings, which were revealed to successive rebirths of Padmasambhava's original disciples. *A Garland of Views* is Padmasambhava's summary and classification of various understandings of the teachings of the Buddha according to different schools, and is thus vital in formulating Right View, the first step proper according to the Noble Eightfold Path of the Buddha. Padmasambhava's exposition divides the Buddhist teachings into three sutra vehicles and six Tantric vehicles, nine in all, which became the accepted system of classifying the different Buddhist ways according to the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism founded by Padmasambhava himself.

Padmasambhava's classification is based on View, Meditation, Result, and Practice. Of these, View is primary. View determines the path one should take. To change one's condition, one must radically change one's view. Once established, one meditates on view, training one's mind and engaging in right conduct until one achieves the desired result.

View is a function of mental disposition. Thus, the ninefold classification of vehicles addresses the diversity of individual views and presents a system of spiritual practice tailored to the spiritual needs of

aspirants of different dispositions, abilities, and intellectual preparedness. This is a systematization and elaboration of the original doctrine of the 84,000 teachings. The progression of the ninefold hierarchy of view, meditation, result, and practice corresponds to increasing degrees of subtlety and profundity, culminating in the highest Buddhist teaching.

A Garland of Views is based on the Guhyagarbha Tantra, the "Tantra of the Secret Essence," which is the root scripture of the Mahayoga class and the central tantra of the Nyingma tradition. Mahayoga, the first of the three Inner Tantras, emphasizes the generation stage of tantric practice – the creation phase in which the practitioner imaginatively assumes the form of a yidam, comparable to the Western esoteric method known as the Assumption of God-Forms. This phase is associated with the body, the birth process, and the yoga of fabrications. Longchenpa (1308–1364), the great Nyingma polymath, calls the Secret Essence Tantra "the highest summit of all vehicles, the source of all scriptural transmissions, the great shortcut of the vehicle of all buddhas of the three times, the most secret."

The full title of the Guhyagarbha Tantra is "The Glorious Net of Magical Illusion: The Secret Essence, the Definitive Nature Just as It Is." Its transmission is traditionally connected with the Indian mahasiddha Kukuraja, who is said to have revealed its meaning to Padmasambhava. Although Garab Dorje (fl. ca. 665 CE) transmitted the Atiyoga or Dzogchen teachings – received directly from Vajrasattva according to tradition – his lineage is distinct from that of the Guhyagarbha, which belongs to the Mahāyoga cycle. The core teaching of the Secret Essence is that all phenomena, including mind and primordial wisdom, arise spontaneously as self-display. The tantra also includes instructions on the manipulation of winds (prana), drops (bindu), and subtle channels, teachings that appear throughout the Inner Tantras, including the Kalacakra cycle, as well as methods for purifying the five aggregates..[115]

The main method of deity yoga is based on identifying oneself with a Buddha image visualized in the imagination, similar to the method called the Assumption of God Forms in the Western esoteric tradition. The Guhyagarbha Tantra spawned a whole cycle of derivative literature including the Tibetan Book of the Dead, a terma text well-known in the West.

[115] Viz., form, feeling, perception, mental formations, consciousness.

The primary text of *A Garland of Views* is just thirteen pages long, and is presented in a highly condensed way known as a "pith instruction." The English translation that I have used includes a commentary by Jamgon Mipham (1846–1912), a.k.a. Mipham the Great, one of the leading figures of the non-sectarian movement (Rimé) in Tibet.

According to the commentator, Jamgon Mipham, *A Garland of Views* was composed by Padmasambhava in a meadow near the Peacock Lake of Trakmar in Chimpu (near Samye and other monasteries) shortly before he left Tibet during the reign of King Trisong Detsen, who reigned ca. 800 CE, based on a text in the Guhyagarbha Tantra, the "Secret Assembly Tantra." The Guhyagarbha is one of the most important Buddhist tantras. It is a Yoga or Mahayoga Tantra, which was supposed to have been taught by the Buddha to King Indrabhuti of Oddiyana. The oldest surviving lineage of the Guhyagarbha goes back to the late 8th century, the text itself having been composed in India in the early 8th century. The Guhyasamāja Tantra was one of the first Buddhist Tantras to refer to sexual yoga. Similarly, we find Siddhartha Gautama (ca. 477–ca. 397 BCE), the historical Buddha, intensely involved in sexual activity prior to his renunciation that led to his ultimate Enlightenment (ca. 442 BCE).

Like the Buddha himself in the Brahmajala Sutta, the first sutta of the Suttapitaka of the Pali Canon, Padmasambhava begins *A Garland of Views* by identifying four "false views entertained by beings in the world," viz., lack of reflection, materialism, nihilism, and eternalism, the latter two being regarded as opposite variations of extremism. The unreflective have no clear view and are confused. Materialists have no views concerning rebirth and are solely preoccupied with material advantage based on science. Nihilists disbelieve in karmic causality. They think that phenomena just appear and disappear. Eternalists believe in self-identity, and are characterized by three views: that reality exists as a causeless effect, a wrong view of causality (that Padmasambhava does not further elaborate), and that unreal or illusory effects proceed from a real cause. According to Padmasambhava, all of these views are based in ignorance (avidya).

In contrast to the foregoing, there is the path that leads beyond the world of samsara, consisting of two vehicles: the vehicle of the characteristics of phenomena, affliction, and purity, a.k.a. as the causal vehicle, which comprise the Basic Vehicle (Hinayana) and the Great

Vehicle (Mahayana), and the Diamond Vehicle (Vajrayana, or Tantra, a.k.a. Secret Mantrayana). The vehicle of characteristics is further divided into the vehicle of listeners, hearers, or disciples (sravakas), the vehicle of hermits or "solitary realizers" (pratyekabuddhas), and the bodhisattva vehicle. The first two pertain to the Hinayana, and are found in the Pali Canon, the latter in the Mahayana, and are found in the Mahayana sutras although the bodhisattva doctrine itself is also found in the Pali Canon. Sravakas reject extremism and meditate on the Four Noble Truths to accomplish the Four Results under the guidance of a teacher, but they believe in the ultimate existence of self-identical particles (atoms?) and instantaneous moments of consciousness. Pratyekabuddhas also reject the extremist doctrine of self-identity but have partially realized non-self-identity in form. They are driven by past karma into the realization of the ultimate nature of phenomena by means of the doctrine of interconnectedness (pratityasamutpada), the essence of which is emptiness, which begins with ignorance and culminates in suffering.

Bodhisattvas, based on bodhicitta, characterized by direct insight into the ultimate nature, "self-arisen gnosis, the single essence," realize that all phenomena are devoid of inherent existence and are mere illusions, and attain unsurpassable enlightenment by means of training in the ten transcendent perfections, proceeding through ten stages or levels (bhumis).[116] Here we move beyond the Hinayana into the Mahayana. The Vajra or Diamond Vehicle follows, also divided into three: Kriyatantra, Ubhayatantra (or Upa, "above"), and Yogatantra. The view of the Kriyatantra and Ubhayatantra is that there is neither arising nor cessation; they practise deity yoga, culminating in pure vision. On this basis the practitioners of the Kriyatantra meditate on the form body of the deity, bringing together the image of the deity's body, the implements symbolizing their mind, mantra recitation, and other requisite elements to gain accomplishment.

The practitioners of the Ubhayatantra also meditate on the form body of the deity, relying on meditative concentration to gain accomplishment.

[116] Very Joyous, Stainless, Light-Maker, Radiant Intellect, Difficult to Master, Manifest, Gone Afar, Immoveable, Good Intelligence, and Cloud of Dharma, characterized by the realization of joy, elimination of defilements, illumination, wisdom, meditation, emptiness, cessation, arhantship, dharma realization, and finally self-perfection.

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Yogatantra is divided into the outer Yogatantra of austerities and the inner Yogatantra of skilled means (upaya). The practitioners of the outer Yogatantra emphasize yoga over the outer requisites, meditating on the male and female energies, concentrating on a perfectly pure mind and meditating, sealed with the four mudras on the form body of the sublime deity to gain accomplishment. The inner Yogatantra is divided into the methods of generation, perfection, and the Great Perfection. These constitute the three highest yanas of the ninefold yana system, a.k.a. Mahayoga, Anuyoga, and Atiyoga (or Dzogchen), corresponding to generation of the deity or skilled means, wisdom, and the non-dual union of skilled means and wisdom respectively.

In the method of generation, concentration is gradually developed and the mandala constructed step by step, training the mind to the level of Universal Light, by meditating on the non-conceptual concentration of "thusness" or "suchness" (dharmata), resulting in accomplishment. In the method of perfection, one clearly visualizes the form body of the Sublime Deity, meditating on everything as the same yet distinct, gaining accomplishment. In the method of the Great Perfection, one meditates on the fact that all phenomena, mundane and supermundane, are the same as the mandala of the enlightened body, speech, and mind. Samsara and nirvana are primordial, yet they appear as illusions, which nevertheless have the nature of nirvana, one with perfect, manifest Buddhahood. This is primordial and is not accomplished by the practice of the path. Thus, all phenomena are inseparable from one's own mind. Padmasambhava quotes the Tantra, "All phenomena abide within the mind. the mind abides in space. And space itself has no abode," and

> All phenomena are by their nature empty.
> All phenomena are primordially perfectly pure.
> All phenomena are completely radiant.
> All phenomena are, by nature, nirvana.
> All phenomena are the perfect, manifest state of enlightenment.

Conviction (or trust), presumably through devotion or faith,[117] is gained by means of four realizations or understandings: that there is one single cause, by using the seed syllable (mantrayoga), blessing or consecration,

[117] *Noble Noose of Methods,* 89.

and direct realization (gnosis). The realization that there is a single cause is the realization that all phenomena are ultimately unborn and undifferentiated, whereas they are all relatively illusory, like the moon reflected in water. The realization by means of syllables is symbolized by the threefold mantra (AUM), representing enlightened body, speech, and mind respectively, in which A is the unborn nature of phenomena, U[118] its illusory display, and M, the awareness that realizes this illusory gnosis, "without centre or circumference." The realization of blessing is the realization that all phenomena may be blessed as enlightened by means of the two previous realizations. Direct realization through perception is the conviction gained in the very depths of one's own mind, through one's own awareness, that phenomena abide primordially in the enlightened state. This is the path of yoga, and its realization is not a matter of cause and effect (karma). Therefore, it is timeless, instantaneous, and spontaneous.

The lower vehicles exist because disciples do not understand that all phenomena are primordially the enlightened state. Each step prepares the aspirant for the ultimate realization according to their ability based on karma, like the steps of a ladder. In the Pali Canon the historical Buddha referred to the short lives of ordinary human beings and their brutish immersion in samsara, their eyes, vision, or understanding covered with dust, and hesitated to teach, indicating that there was much more to the dharma than what he did eventually teach. Padmasambhava says, "'It's all a pack of lies,' they say, belittling superior beings and giving rise to an attitude of repudiation. This is why this teaching is extremely secret and also why it is called the Secret Vehicle," to be practised only by superior persons.[119] In particular, Padmasambhava says that austerities, such as bodily self-mortification, are mistaken, reiterating the historical Buddha's rejection of this form of asceticism. Therefore it follows that one should purify and perfect one's view.

As a deep study of the Pali Canon also makes clear, and as I have emphasized many times, the cultivation of wisdom itself is the salvific factor, culminating in non-dual gnosis. This is the fundamental principle of the Perfection of Wisdom (Prajnaparamita). This is the simplest

[118] Or "O."

[119] *Noble Noose of Methods,* 91. This implies that such persons can dispense with the lower yanas, and proceed directly to the practice of the Mahayoga.

imaginable teaching, reminiscent of Laozi, but precisely because of its simplicity it is also the most difficult to realize. Padmasambhava himself spent many years meditating in cemeteries and engaged in other practices before he realized Enlightenment; it is not a matter of "imagining" one is enlightened, as some modern pseudo-gurus today teach. One can see why Padmasambhava's doctrine was not welcome in late 8th century Tibet, in the wake of the Great Debate, in which the Indian gradualist schools emerged as the dominant ideology in opposition to Chinese subitism, the doctrine of sudden enlightenment.

Highlights

- Some Nyingma terma traditions, as well as Himalayan oral lineages, regard Padmasambhava as an emanation or second appearance of the historical Buddha Shakyamuni, while others identify him with Amitabha or Avalokiteshvara.
- *A Garland of Views* is attributed to Padmasambhava himself.
- The text is divided into two parts, consisting of different philosophical views and different yogic disciplines.
- *A Garland of Views* arises from the same Mahayoga milieu as the Guhyagarbha Tantra, which Padmasambhava is said to have received from the siddha Kukuraja. The four erroneous views are lack of reflection, materialism, nihilism, and eternalism.
- Padmasambhava divides the Buddhist teachings into three sets of three vehicles, arranged in an ascending hierarchy: two Hinayana vehicles, one Mahayana vehicle, three outer mantra vehicles involving deity yoga, and three inner mantra vehicles.
- Two paths lead beyond samsara: the path of characteristics (based on causality and karma) and the Diamond Vehicle (Vajrayana).
- Each vehicle is analysed by the categories of View, Meditation, Result, and Practice.
- The path consists in the progressive purification and perfection of one's view, culminating in non-dual gnosis.
- The three highest vehicles are the generation stage, the perfection or completion stage, and the great perfection (Dzogchen).
- Only the highest vehicle communicates the essential truth that all phenomena, mundane and supramundane, are inseparable from the mandala of the enlightened body, speech, and mind, which is

the nature of one's own awareness. This realization is instantaneous, whereas the realizations of the lower vehicles are gradual. Thus Padmasambhava reconciles the doctrines of gradualism and subitism.

- Padmasambhava spent many years practising in cremation grounds and wild places, undertaking disciplines that include shamanic and esoteric yogas, in order to complete his realization.
- The Guhyagarbha Tantra is the central Mahayoga scripture of the Nyingma school, emphasising deity yoga and symbolic union. Padmasambhava is said to have attained profound Mahayoga realization at Yanglesho in Nepal, especially through Vajrakila practice. Although later Nyingma tertons employ consort practices from Anuyoga and Yogini Tantra cycles, these practices are not derived from the Guhyagarbha itself.

PART III – PHILOSOPHICAL SECTION, 2

A NOBLE NOOSE OF METHODS AND THE MAHAYOGA

A Noble Noose of Methods: The Lotus Garland Synopsis is a Mahayoga Tantra of the 10th century, which may also be attributed to Padmasambhava.[120] The word "noble" refers to accomplishment in a single lifetime. "Noose" refers to the non-abandonment of samsara. "Methods" refers to liberation of evil beings through great compassionate action. The "lotus" symbolizes wisdom and "garland" symbolizes method (or skilled means). "Synopsis" indicates that it represents a summary of all key scriptural sources.[121]

Unfortunately, I have not been able to find an English translation of this work. However, I have found a Tibetan edition of the text with extensive scholarly apparatus in English. My remarks that follow are based on this

[120] *Noble Noose of Methods,* esp. 91–98. Cantell and Mayer also refer to a commentary on another book, *The Charnel Ground Cuckoo's Display* (Dur khrod khu byug rol pa), an Anuyoga root sutra, entitled "The Elixir's Vital Seed," attributed in the Tenjur to Padmasmabhava (ibid, 92). I have not been able to locate an English translation of this text. It is unclear whether Padmasambhava is the author of the Tantra, the commentary, or both, but it is reasonably certain that at the very least they come out of the original tradition associated with him and the *Garland of Views,* which as I have previously stated is generally accepted as the work of Padmasambhava.

[121] Ibid, 68.

scholarly apparatus.[122] As in *A Garland of Views,* we find in the *Noble Noose of Methods* the doctrine of "the sameness of all dharmas," "ultimately equally unborn and unceasing"[123] and "the primordial purity of all phenomena,"[124] which is one of the essential distinguishing doctrines of the Great Perfection (Dzogchen).[125] The Tantra is characterized by a mystical and esoteric interpretation of Tantric ritual which recalls the historical Buddha's insistence that rituals have no intrinsic efficacy. For example, the Buddha is identified as the quality of innate mental awareness rather than with an historical individual, and empowerment through one's own natural awareness supersedes ritual. Thus, apparently mundane references are reinterpreted in transcendental terms and ritual is referred to as transformative and powerful in the pursuit of enlightenment.[126] "Enlightenment is to be found by looking into one's own mind."[127] Padmasambhava is also referred to as a realized being associated with the highest level of the Mahayoga transmission, and is regarded as the most advanced spiritual master in the world at that time.[128]

The aforementioned scholarly apparatus includes a sixteen-page synopsis of the forty-two[129] chapters of the *Noble Noose of Methods,* beginning with Chapter 1, "The Two Truths."

Synopsis of the Forty-Two Chapters of the *Noble Noose of Methods*

Broadly, the *Noble Noose of Methods* may be divided into the following twelve moments: (1) the two truths doctrine, (2) the samayas, vows or precepts, (3) esoteric transmission or empowerment, (4) offering, (5) five

[122] Ibid, esp. 1–102.

[123] Ibid, 88.

[124] Otherwise expressed as "the ultimate sameness of the dharmas of samsara and nirvana, and the total purity of the defiled dharmas as the enlightened body, speech and mind of the tantric deities (ibid, 87). "All dharmas are empty in their essential nature, … primordially totally pure, entirely clear light, nirvana in nature, primordially the completely perfected buddhahood" (ibid, 89).

[125] Ibid, 4, 87.

[126] Ibid, 5.

[127] Ibid,89.

[128] Ibid, 11f.

[129] Forty-two is the number of letters in the Sanskrit alphabet, representing forty-two stages on the path to enlightenment. Interestingly, it is also the number of the meaning of the life in *The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy.* It is of course half of eighty-four, a number frequently found in Buddhism, representing totality.

chapters on the mandala, (6) two chapters on siddhis or accomplishments, (7) four chapters on mantras, (8) two chapters on mudras, (9) two chapters on the rakshasis or female demons, (10) fifteen chapters on ritual, especially the homa ritual, (11) four chapters on the phurba or ritual knife, (12) four chapters on the torma or Tantric figures made of flour and butter, and a conclusion. Rather than attempt to summarize these chapters in detail, I am going to conclude this section with a broad summary of these categories.

The Two Truths Doctrine (Chap. 1). The Two Truths doctrine makes a distinction between conventional (or provisional) truth, which describes the phenomenal or contingent world of samsara, and ultimate truth, which describes the ultimate reality of emptiness (sunyata), devoid of concrete or inherent characteristics. Conventional truth is a veil or screen of appearances, identified with ignorance, which obscures the true nature of reality. It is dual, divided into knower and known, or experiencer and experienced, and objects which are ultimately devoid of self-identity. Ultimate truth is free of the subject-object duality. The Pali Canon distinguishes between direct and indirect meanings, or conventional and ultimate (or higher) meanings, in the suttas, the latter of which requires further explanation.

According to Nagarjuna (ca. 150–ca. 250), the two truths are epistemological. The existence of the phenomenal world (samsara) is provisional, neither real nor unreal. Ultimately phenomena are empty of inherent essence or existence, but are interdependent. This is the basis of the Madhyamaka view. In Chinese Buddhism the two truths are ontological. Reality is relative and absolute. There is an essential truth above sunyata and the two truths which is identical with Buddha nature. According to the sunyata doctrine, no metaphysical system is or can be absolutely valid. In Tibetan Buddhism, according to Mipham, meditation on the union of the two truths leads to the arising of primordial wisdom. Thus, one eventually actualizes that which surpasses intellectual knowledge (gnosis). This leads to the doctrine of the indivisibility of the two truths. The doctrine of the two truths ultimately resolves the lived experience of non-duality and non-differentiation.

Samaya (Chap. 2). Samaya refers to a set of vows or precepts given to an initiate in an esoteric Vajrayana Buddhist order as part of the empowerment or initiation ceremony that creates the bond between guru

and disciple. The term includes a particular system of teachings or doctrines; the conduct required of a tantric practitioner; the realization of Buddhahood; and union with the body, speech, and mind of the Buddha. Sakya Pandita, the 12th century Tibetan Buddhist scholar, identifies fourteen points that may not be violated that are widely followed in Tibetan Buddhism:

1. Disrespecting the vajra master.
2. Transgressing the words of the buddhas.
3. Insulting one's vajra brothers and sisters.
4. Abandoning love for sentient beings.
5. Abandoning the bodhichitta in aspiration or application.
6. Criticizing the teachings of the sutras and tantras.
7. Revealing secrets to those who are unworthy.
8. Mistreating one's body.
9. Rejecting emptiness.
10. Keeping bad company.
11. Failing to reflect on emptiness.
12. Upsetting those who have faith in the teachings.
13. Failing to observe the samaya commitments.
14. Denigrating women.

These points suggest the vow of a bodhisattva, which includes paying homage to, praising the virtues of, serving and making offerings to, and rejoicing in the merits and virtues of the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and all sentient beings, upholding the precepts, asking the Buddha to teach the dharma, always following the Buddha's teachings, and serving and benefitting all sentient beings, including transferring the merit from all practices to and for the emancipation of all sentient beings (Avatamsaka Sutra). In the Nyingma lineage the three root samayas are body, speech, and mind. These require refraining from evil with respect to each, maintaining "sacred view," which means to view all beings and all phenomena as primordially pure, and serving the guru and the sangha, practising mantra, refraining from divulging the secrets, and always maintaining the view that one's mind is essentially dharmakaya, the true or real body of the Buddha. Although the conventional view is that samaya is easily damaged, Padmasambhava himself says that any action that is

undertaken in the sincere spirit of compassion for all sentient beings cannot violate samaya.[130]

Esoteric Transmission (Chap 3). During esoteric transmission teachings are communicated from the guru to their disciple during a Vajrayana empowerment ritual in a space containing the mandala of the deity, recalling my discussion of the meaning of "deity." Many techniques are regarded as "secret," and are communicated using a symbolic code known as "the twilight language." This language requires the interpretation and guidance of a teacher. Some teachings are regarded as "self-secret" in the sense that they could not be understood even if they were directly revealed to a person.

The empowerment ritual, hearing the text, and oral instruction on how to carry out the practice are traditionally required before one may begin tantric practice. Mipham says that empowerment produces the view of mantra in one's being as the basis for practicing Vajrayana: "the profound empowerment ritual produces a sudden manifestation of the ground mandala that dwells primordially within oneself." Kongtrul says that empowerment "ripens the student's mind by planting the special seeds of the resultant four dimensions of awakening in the aggregates, elements, and sense fields of the recipient." The mandala is made of flowers, coloured powders, grains, paint, or is visualized. In the Dzogchen tradition, direct introduction is called the Empowerment of Awareness, in which the student is introduced to the intrinsic nature of their mind-essence (rigpa). The pointing out instruction, also referred to as "pointing out the nature of mind," "pointing out transmission," or "introduction to the nature of mind," introduces the disciple to the nature of mind.

Offering (Chap. 4). In Buddhism, symbolic offerings are made to the Three Jewels, including candles, lamps, incense, flowers, food, fruit, water, drinks, etc. The objects themselves are not regarded as intrinsically efficacious, but rather the attitude with which they are offered produces merit, which leads to a better rebirth and progress towards the ultimate goal of liberation and enlightenment. These offerings can also act as a preparation for meditation. Some traditions distinguish between material or hospitality offerings and practice offerings.

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[130] "Whatever bodhisattvas do, positive or negative, if they are imbued with great compassion, they will not damage their vows" (*Garland of Views,* 25).

Material offerings are *external* offerings of words and deeds, often symbolic in character. In Northern Buddhism sacred images have water, scarves, flowers, incense, lamps, perfume, and food laid before them, representing purification, friendship, and devotion. Non-material or practice offerings are *internal* offerings for mental development, including giving, moral action, meditation, and wisdom. In the Pali Canon the Buddha says that practice offerings are "the best way of honouring the Buddha" and "the supreme offering."

The Mandala (Chaps. 5, 6, 7, 12, 41). A mandala (lit. "circle") is a geometric symbolic structure. Mandalas focus attention, facilitate spiritual guidance, define sacred space, and aid meditation and inducing trance. It may be used as a map representing deities, paradises, or shrines. It describes the spiritual journey in stages from the circumference to the centre. In Vajrayana Buddhism mandalas have also developed into sand panting.

The mandala visually represents the essential Vajrayana teachings. It represents the nature of the Pure Land and enlightened mind as a microcosm representing a divine cosmology or various aspects of enlightenment. Tantric Buddhists meditate on the mandala until it can be visualized in detail, becoming fully internalized. Every mandala is accompanied by a tantric liturgy, including instructions on how to construct and visualize the mandala and the accompanying mantras which empower the mantra. The visualization of pure lands enables one to realize the essential purity of experience itself as the abode of enlightenment.

Sand mandalas are typically brushed together into a pile as a meditation on impermanence and poured into a body of running water to spread its blessings. A mandala offering offers the entire universe to the buddhas and/or one's teacher. One hundred thousand mandala offerings are part of the preliminary requirement to engage in tantric practice, called ngondro.[131] Mandalas are also described in Pali Buddhist texts, including the Mandala of Eight Disciples, the Mandala of Buddhas, and the Mandala of Eight Devis. In Shingon Buddhism a blindfolded initiate tosses a flower into a mandala to identify their yidam or personal deity. Mandalas also

[131] Along with taking refuge and prostration, the cultivation of bodhicitta, the recitation of Vajrasattva's hundred syllable mantra, and guru yoga, held to purify pride, jealousy, hatred, and delusion respectively, the mandala offering itself purifying attachment.

appear in Mesoamerican civilization and in Christianity, as well as in the psychology of Carl Gustav Jung.

The Siddhis (Chaps. 8, 40). Siddhis (lit. "knowledge, accomplishment, attainment, success") are psychic abilities resulting from ego-transcending practices (sadhanas) such as meditation and yoga, traditionally said to include clairvoyance, levitation, bilocation, becoming as small as an atom, materialization, and past-life recall, although any extraordinary abilities resulting from yoga practices may be described as siddhis. Claims of siddhis are found throughout the Pali Canon and the Buddha appears to have accepted their reality, but discouraged practitioners from making their cultivation their primary goal. Dipa Ma (1911–1989), a prominent Theravadin meditation teacher, was said to exhibit such abilities, which are believed to result from the mastery of meditative concentration (kasina meditation). Patanjali says that "accomplishments may be attained through birth, the use of herbs,[132] incantations, self-discipline or samadhi."

Mantra (Chaps. 9, 11, 14, 15). A mantra (from. Sanskrit man, "to think," hence structured formulae of thoughts) is a sacred formula or sound with a specific resonant structure which is believed to be inherently spiritually efficacious (possessing power or "shakti"). Some mantras can be translated, others not. The oldest mantras were composed in Vedic Sanskrit in India, before 1000 BCE, but there are also mantras in Pali, Chinese, Japanese, and Tibetan. For example, OM or AUM is believed to be the original cosmic vibration. Other, more complex mantras express spiritual meanings pertaining to truth, reality, light, immortality, peace, love, knowledge, and action.

Mantras may be melodic, uplifting, and meaningful. Mantras are found in Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Sufism, Zoroastrianism, Taoism, Bon, and shamanism, and play a central role in Tantra. The name of the Japanese Shingon sect means "mantra" (lit. "true speech"). Mantras connote dharma, truth, reality, and inherent fulfillment. Mantras may also be used as spells or spiritual weapons, and thus have a magical quality. Mantras may be meditated on, recited, muttered, or sung, and are believed to aid meditative concentration.

[132] Referring presumably to psychedelics.

Mantras are referred to in the Pali Canon and are found in the oldest forms of Buddhism, including Theravada, such as the repetition of "Buddho," used in the Thai Forest Tradition. Some mantras are used to develop compassion (metta). Some mantras take the form of simple affirmations. Mantra practice is often combined with breathing techniques (pranayama), and is especially popular among lay people. Mantras calm the mind or express spiritual insights. Tantric Theravada, a.k.a. Southern Esoteric Buddhism, which is the oldest living Theravadin tradition,[133] recite Namo Buddhaya ("Homage to the Buddha"), Araham ("Venerable"), and may be combined with the use of amulets. In China mantras are used for protection or purification. Specific mantras are often associated with particular buddhas, bodhisattvas, or deities.

In Japan Kukai (774–835), a noted Buddhist monk, developed a theory of language in which every syllable of a dharani, referring to Buddhist chants, mnemonic codes, incantations, or recitations, was a manifestation of the true nature or ultimate reality, and that all sounds manifest sunyata, emptiness of self-nature. According to Kukai, all sounds originate from A (cf. AUM), associated with sunyata. In Sanskrit A is a prefix which changes the meaning of a word into its opposite, similar to English. The Mahavairocana Sutra, central to Shingon, says, "Thanks to the original vows of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, a miraculous force resides in the mantras, so that by pronouncing them one acquires merit without limits." The original name of the Nyingma school of Tibetan Buddhism, founded by Padmasambhava, was Mantrayana, which became a synonym for Vajrayana.

According to Edward Conze, the use of mantras passed through three historical stages. In the first stage, mantras were associated with the pan-Indian doctrine of the Power of Truth, also found in the Pali Canon. In the second stage (1st to 13th centuries CE), mantras were associated with spirituality. In the third stage (7th century on) mantras became associated with salvific empowerment, and were combined with mudras and visualizations.

The most famous Buddhist mantra is OM MANI PADME HUM, the six-syllable mantra of Avalokiteshavara, the bodhisattva of compassion, which literally means "OM the Jewel in the Lotus HUM." OM I have

[133] Crosby, *Traditional Theravada Meditation and its Modern-Era Suppression.*

already explained; HUM represents the spirit of enlightenment or wisdom.

Mudra (Chaps. 10, 16). Mudra (lit. "seal, mark, gesture") is a Hindu, Jain, or Buddhist ritual gesture or pose. Mudras may involve the entire body or just hand gestures. Mudras are significant in Indian religion, dance, and yoga. In hatha yoga, mudras are used together with pranayama, usually while seated, to affect the breathing and direct the flow of prana. It is also associated with bindu, seminal energy; bodhicitta, the thought of enlightenment; amrita, the nectar of immortality; and consciousness.

Buddha images are commonly shown in various postures (asanas) and mudras, often representing various moments in the life of the Buddha, including

- the gesture of fearlessness (abhayamudra),
- earth witness (bhumisparsa),
- fist of wisdom (bodhyangi),
- turning of the wheel (dharmacakra pravartana),
- meditation (dhyana) mudra, a.k.a. samadhi or yoga mudra,
- generosity gesture (varada mudra)
- thunder gesture (Vajra mudra),
- mudra of discussion or explanation (vitarka or vyakhyana mudra),
- mudra of wisdom (jhana mudra), which has been dated to 700 BCE, and
- karana or tarjani mudra, similar to the Western "sign of the horns," which is believed to repel negative energy.

The Indian dance form known as Kathakali involves as many as nine hundred mudras, including the hands, arms, and body and facial expressions. The *Hathayogapradipika* emphasizes the importance of mudras, stating that "the [Kundalini] goddess sleeping at the entrance of Brahma's door [at the base of the spine] should be constantly aroused with all effort, by performing mudra thoroughly." The kechari mudra, in which the tongue is turned back "into the hollow of the skull," seals in the bindu fluid so that it stops dripping down from the head, and is not lost, similar to a mudra attributed to the Buddha in the Pali Canon, where the Buddha

recommends pressing the tongue against the roof of the mouth.[134] In the famous vajroli mudra, the bindu is retained or reabsorbed.

Some Asian martial arts also utilize mudras. Tendai and Shingon Buddhism derived similar mudras from Mikkyo ("esoteric") Buddhism, which are considered to be not only spiritually but physically powerful.

The Rakshasis (13, 15). Rakshasis are female cannibalistic beings described in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism, also referred to as "man-eaters," rakshasa being the male form. This term is also used to describe asuras, power-mongering deities that are conventionally regarded as anti-spiritual. They are often described as anti-Buddhist, although according to the Pali Canon some asuras at least respected the Buddha. In chapter 26 of the Lotus Sutra a group of rakshasa daughters swear to uphold and protect the Lotus Sutra. They also teach dharanis which protect those who uphold the sutra.

According to the Lankavatara Sutra, Sri Lanka is identified as the land of the rakshasas, whose king, Ravana, invites the Buddha to Sri Lanka to teach. Rakshasa is also a nickname ascribed to Padmasambhava for his wrathful conquest of Buddhist heretics.

The rakshasis appear in chapters 13 and 15 of the *Noble Noose of Methods,* in which the wrathful female mandala deities are absorbed into the body in accordance with the primary doctrines of the sameness and primordial purity of all phenomena, previously discussed. In psychological terms, negative psychic energy is consciously assimilated in order to avoid creating a negative compensation such as one sees in exoteric and dualistic religiosity. [135]

Homa (Ritual) (Chaps. 17, 18, 19, 22, 23, 24, 25, 28, 29, 30, 33, 34, 35, 38, 39). *A Noble Noose of Methods* devotes no less than fifteen chapters to

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[134] "With his teeth clenched and his tongue pressed against the roof of his mouth, he beats down, constrains, and crushes mind with mind" (Vitakkasanthana Sutta, MN 20.7f., trans. Nanamoli and Bodhi).

[135] E.g., Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, which together represent 54.3% of the human population, all demonizing each other and those who do not follow their particular paths. Theravada Buddhism is similar (see Bhikkhu Bodhi, "Dhamma and Non-duality"). We see the consequences of the latter in Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Thailand. Marxism and capitalism are also both based in an "us versus them" mentality which is ultimately mutually destructive. All of this is the consequence of metaphysical dualism, which is epistemologically unsatisfactory and actually productive of the very evil it seeks to destroy. The subject-object dichotomy, the original duality, is of course the original and originating condition of samsara, identical with ignorance (avidya).

various kinds of ritual. For the purpose of this introductory overview, I am going to focus on the homa ritual, and leave a detailed consideration of the rest for the future.

Also known as havan and yajna, homa (lit. "pouring into fire, offer, sacrifice") is an ancient Vedic fire ritual performed by a priest for a householder on special occasions, such as weddings, in which grains, ghee, milk, incense, and seeds are offered to the fire. In Shingon temples it is performed daily. It expresses a reverence for fire and cooked food, and is believed to be productive of merit, with various spiritual interpretations, and is also related to soma, the reputed drink of the gods which confers immortality. The symbolic interpretation of the rite is especially important in Buddhism, since the Buddha specifically denied the intrinsic efficacy of ritual: e.g., fire and water represent male and female energies or vertical and horizontal polarities of existence, the square mandala represents the earth or the cosmos, etc.[136] The homa ritual is found in ancient Buddhism and Jainism, and spread to central, east, and southeast Asia, especially Tibet, China, and Japan. Its oldest forms go back to the Brahmanas (900–700 BCE). The Mahayana appropriation of the homa is based on the belief, alluded to in the Pali Canon, that the Buddha was restoring the true spiritual interpretation of the primordial religion of the Vedas. Its Buddhist forms include invoking Buddhist deities, making offerings to the fire, reciting mantras, clapping, reciting hymns, beating drums, blowing conch shells, and a central mandala.

In addition to the homa, other ritual actions described in the *Noble Noose of Methods* include the destructive ritual, the ritual union, conferring transference of abode, the captivation ritual, the increasing ritual, and the pacifying ritual.

Phurba (Chaps. 20, 26, 31, 36). Tibetan phurba (Skt. kila, kilaka, or kilaya, "nail") is a nail-like ritual implement, peg, stake, or knife, having three sides, associated with Indo-Tibetan Buddhism, Bon, and Indian Vedic traditions, and used by shamans, magicians, tantrikas, and lamas. The phurba is a manifestation of the nominal body (nirmanakaya) of the

[136] Cf. the Twin Miracle of the Buddha, in which he is supposed to have levitated and emitted fire and water from his body, then alternated between them. The reputed miracle is not canonical but is described in a commentary on the Pali Canon. See Sarah Shaw, *Buddhist Meditation,* 97. Of course, one can find meaning in this story without taking it literally.

meditational deity (yidam or ishtadevata) Vajrakila or Vajrakilaya (Tib. Dorje Phurba), a wrathful heruka (Wisdom King) deity who embodies the enlightened activity of all the Buddhas, who removes obstacles and destroys antagonistic forces. Phurbas generally have a pommel, handle, and blade, often segmented into threes on vertical and horizontal axes, highlighting the numerological significance and spiritual significance of the numbers three and nine. They may be made of wood, metal, clay, bone, gems, horn, or crystal. Phurbas are often made of brass or iron, especially terrestrial or meteoric iron and tektites, gravel-sized bodies of black, green, brown, or grey natural glass formed from terrestrial debris ejected during meteorite impacts. Meteoric iron was highly prized throughout the Himalayas and was incorporated into five-metal alloys called panchaloha, of sacred significance used for ritual implements. The pommel often bears three faces of Vajrakila, joyful, peaceful, and wrathful, or an umbrella, mushroom cap, yidam, snow lion, stupa, etc. The handle often features a vajra ("diamond-thunderbolt"), weaving, or knot work design, generally of a triune form. The blade is generally composed of three triangular facets or faces, meeting at the tip, representing the blade's power to transform the three poisons or root poisons of attachment/craving/desire, delusion/ignorance/misconception, and aversion/fear/hate.

One of the main methods to actualize the essence/quality of the phurba is to pierce the earth with it, sheath it, or to plunge it into a container of rice. The phurba may be regarded as an axis mundi or world tree, symbolically connecting heaven and earth. The phurba stabilizes a prayer ground during ceremonies. Its energy is fierce, wrathful, piercing, affixing, transfixing. It spatializes the earth, establishing an energetic continuum. Wooden phurbas may be used for shamanic healing, harmonizing, and energy work, and often have two snakes, serpents, or dragons (nagas) entwined on the blade. Phurbas often bear one or more of the eight auspicious signs (ashtamangala, i.e., parasol, golden fish, conch, vase, lotus, knot, banner, and wheel) or a swastika.

The phurba may be used for curing disease, exorcism, killing demons, meditation, consecration (puja), and even weather-making. The blade destroys demonic forces. The top of the phurba is used for blessings. Robert Beer says,

> The sting of the scorpion's whip-like tail transfixes and poisons its prey, and in this respect it is identified with the wrathful activity of the ritual dagger or kīla. Padmasambhava's biography relates how he received the siddhi of the kīla transmission at the great charnel ground of Rajagriha from a gigantic scorpion with nine heads, eighteen pincers and twenty-seven eyes. This scorpion reveals the kīla texts from a triangular stone box hidden beneath a rock in the cemetery. As Padmasambhava reads this terma text spontaneous understanding arises, and the heads, pincers, and eyes of the scorpion are 'revealed' as different vehicles or yanas of spiritual attainment. Here, at Rajagriha, Padmasambhava is given the title of 'the scorpion guru', and in one of his eight forms as Guru Dragpo or Pema Drago ('wrathful lotus'), he is depicted with a scorpion in his left hand. As an emblem of the wrathful kīla transmission the image of the scorpion took on a strong symbolic meaning in the early development of the Nyingma or 'ancient school' of Tibetan Buddhism.[137]

Note that Padmasambhava himself is here described as reading a terma text, indicating that the concept of the terma is not original or restricted to Padmasambhava's successors.

Phurbas are cognate with prayer flags and stone pillars in that they pierce the land, comparable to the idea of breaking the earth, turning the sod, or laying a foundation stone, sanctifying the ground that lies beneath, placating the spirits of place and preparing the land as a rite to ensure fertility and a bountiful yield.

Torma (Chap. 21, 27, 32, 37). Tormas (lit. "to cast away, break up, scatter") are butter and flour figures used in Tantric Buddhist rituals or used as offerings. They may be dyed in various colours. Often the main body of the torma, usually conical, is red or white. Typically they are small and placed on a shrine, plate, mounted on leather, or sit on a special base such as a skull. Tormas follow the pre-Tibetan Buddhist tradition of offering cakes. The term implies offering, letting go, or detachment. Sometimes tormas are placed on shrines for ceremonies or to represent deities. Others are used for feast practice (ganachakras?) and are consumed by celebrants. Others appease spirits, accumulate merit, or remove obstacles. Mostly they are made of barley flour and butter, as well as egg, milk, sugar, honey, and even meat. In addition to deity, food, and offering tormas, medicinal tormas may be used shamanically to extract

[137] Beer, *Encyclopedia of Tibetan Symbols and Motifs,* 277f.

disease from a patient. Captured tormas may be used to expedite completion of activities, by planning to offer the torma when an activity is completed. Inner, secret, and very secret tormas involve meditation with deity visualization as a form of torma offering although no physical cake is involved. Thus, one may offer one's psychological experiences such as an experience of "suchness" as non-physical torma offerings. This last category suggests that tormas may actually be regarded as physical projections of psychological experiences, as suggested by Jung. Similarly, the Tantras recognize "deities" as psychological archetypes, as previously mentioned.

APPENDIX

In his *Teachings of Padmasambhava* Herbert Guenther also identifies six terma texts that he attributes to Padmasambhava, viz.,

- sPros-gcod rtsa-ba (*The Fundamental Teachings of Chöd*);
- bCud-kyi yang-snying (*The Heart Essence of the Blood*);
- bDud-rtsi bcud-thigs (*The Nectar Drop*);
- sNang-gsal spu-gri (*The Illumination as Sharp as a Razor*);
- sNang-srid kha-sbyor (*The Non-duality of Phenomena*).[138]

As far as I know, none of these have been translated into English (other than Guenther's selected quotations in *Teachings*).

CHRONOLOGY

Note: Dates vary widely and are not necessarily mutually consistent. The below is just a sampling of possible dates based on some reputable sources.

100 BCE. Approximate date of oldest *Prajnaparamita* texts.

ca. 35, 25 or 29-17 BCE. Date of writing down of the Pali Canon. Other authorities say earlier in the 1st century BCE.

[138] Guenther, op. cit., 6 n. 13.

ca. 665. Wikipedia's date for Garab Dorje. *Encyclopedia of Buddhism* says he flourished ca. 55 CE (other dates range from 184 to 57 BCE), which are all too early for him to have been in contact with Padmasambhava. Okar Research says he was born close to Lake Kutra in the region of Dhanakosha and lived in the 7th century.

717. Birth year of Padmasambhava, according to Google.

725 CE. Birth of Santarashita. Madhyamaka philosopher who founded Samye monastery (*Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*).

732. Birth of Padmasambhava in a village near the present day town of Chakdara in Lower Dir District (Okar Research)

742. Herbert Guenther's date for beginning of the reign of King Trisong Detsen.

745. **Padmasambhava "flees" Oddiyana in the direction of Kashmir, where he remains until 752** (Okar Research).

749. Padmasambhava's arrival in Tibet (Government of Sikkim website).

750. Election of Gaupala as emperor of Gauda.

754. Beginning of reign of King Trisong Detsen (*Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*).

755. Beginning of reign of King Trisong Detsen.

756. Enthronement of King Trisong Detsen (*Dunhuang Annals*).

757. Birth of Yeshe Tsogyal (Okar Research, *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*).

763. Possible start date for construction of Samye monastery.

771. Herbert Guenther's date for Trisong Detsen's edict setting up Buddhism as the state religion of Tibet.

774. Herbert Guenther's approximate date for end of reign of King Trisong Detsen and **Padmasambhava's departure from Tibet. Also cited by Okar Research, who says he was "chased out of Tibet." See also 779 and 786.**

ca. 775. Founding of Samye monastery (*Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*).

777. Approximate beginning of reign of Dharmapala.

779. Completion date for construction of Samye monastery. **Possible approximate date for entry of Padmasambhava into Tibet.**

786. Okar Research's date for Padmasambhava's entry into Tibet.

788. Death of Santarakṣita (*Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*).

792. Beginning of the Great Debate.

794. End of the Great Debate.

797. Possible date for the end of King Trisong Detsen's reign. Approximate date of the Great Debate (*Princeton Encyclopedia of Buddhism*).

799. End of reign of King Trisong Detsen (*Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*).

ca. 800. Alternative date for the end of Trisong Detsen's reign.

803. Padmasambhava's departure from Tibet (Government of Sikkim website).

804. Alternative date for the end of King Trisong Detsen's reign. **Latest probable date for departure of Padmasambhava from Tibet.**

816. Approximate end of reign of Dharmapala and beginning of reign of Devapala.

817. Death of Yeshe Tsogyal, consort of Padmasambhava (Okar Research, *Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*).

842. Beginning of "era of fragmentation" prophesied by Padmasambhava.

855. Approximate end of reign of Devapala.

Early 11th century. End of "era of fragmentation."

1124. The birth of Nyangrel Nyima Özer, one of the first major treasure revealers and a key figure in establishing the classical terma tradition associated with Padmasambhava.

ca. 1247. Alternative date for end of "era of fragmentation."

1575. Birth of Taranatha (*Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*).

1611. Taranatha writes *Life of Padmasambhava.*

1634. Death of Taranatha (*Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*).

20
The Wisdom of Laozi

"將欲取天下而為之
吾見其不得已
Laozi, Tao Te Ching

"Now is the time...to destroy those who destroy the earth."
Revelation of John

Laotzi's Tao Te Ching is the chief book of the Daozang, the canon of the Taoist school or sect, made up of 1,476 books in 5,486 volumes. The title may be rendered as "The Classic of the Way [Tao] and [Its] Virtue [De]." The oldest extant copy is dated to the 3rd century BCE. Scholars judge it to have been written between the fourth and sixth centuries BCE. In Chinese custom it was written by Laozi five or six hundred years before the common era, but the teachings of the Tao Te Ching are surely much older than the text itself, which is a digest of old teachings going back to the primal proto-Eastern pan-wisdom centre, located perhaps in the Kunlun Mountains (see "Sacred and Profane Time," below).

The name Laozi means "Old Master" and was likely given to Laozi after his death. Legend states that he was born with white hair, but it may also refer to his simple nature. He is also known as Lao Tan or Li Erh. In Chinese custom Laozi was born in 604 BCE, and thus was an elder coëval of K'ung-Fu-tzu (Confucius, 551–479 BCE). He was born in Hu-hsien in the state of Chu, now known as Henan Province in south-east central China. During his life, he was employed by the king of Chou as his record-keeper. At that time, that job involved the keeping of sacred books such as the I Ching and was linked with fortune-telling and star-lore (astrology). Laozi

tired of court politics and retired at an advanced age. Laozi went west to the border, where Yinxi, a.k.a. Kuan-yin-tzu, the Warden of the Mountain Pass of Hsien-ku, saw him. That he was seen and stopped shows that Laozi was well-known. Yinxi would not allow Laozi to pass till he had set down his wisdom in a book, lest it be lost. Impressed by the warden's faith, Laozi paused for two days to write down the 5,000 signs of the Tao Te Ching, a.k.a. the Text of the Five Thousand Signs, although in fact the number of signs is between five and six thousand. In Lin Yutang's English version, this works out to about 8,000 words. In actual fact, however, the Tao Te Ching is a composite work, composed of over 250 short sayings or aphorisms. Only nine chapters seem to be singular compositions.[139] Right after this Laozi departs from any formal annals. Some say he went to India where he taught the Buddha (563–483 BCE, trad.), whose teachings as set down in the Pali Canon look like the teachings of the Tao Te Ching. Others say he became a recluse living on the sacred mountain range called Kunlun on the eastern border of Tibet. In Tibetan custom, the pre-Buddhist Bon faith of Tonpa Shenrab Miwoche, a.k.a. Shenrab Miwo, comes from Laozi. Some Western scholars doubt that Laozi was a real person, but there is nothing far-fetched in the basic story, and the point of view of the work itself is original. Many scholars believe that Laozi was a real person, perhaps the founder of a school the teachings of which were handed down and gathered in the Tao Te Ching by those who came after. Perhaps in fairness this is the truest view, since someone clearly wrote or compiled the Tao Te Ching.

The Tao Te Ching is made up of eighty-one chapters in two parts: The first thirty-seven chapters make up the Book of the Tao ("Way"), whereas chapters 38 to 81 make up the Book of the De ("Power" or "Virtue"). Lin Yutang in his version has broken the book down into smaller units: Book I: The Character of Tao (Chapters 1–6), Book II: The Lessons of Tao (Chapters 7–13), Book III: The Imitation of Tao (Chapters 14–25), Book IV: The Source of Power (Chapters 26–40), Book V: The Conduct of Life (Chapters 41–56), Book VI: The Theory of Government (Chapters 57–75), and Book VII: Aphorisms (Chapters 76–81).

The Tao Te Ching presents a subtle and complex system of thought with many aspects. Six major skeins of meaning can be seen in its complex,

[139] Chaps. 6, 9, 18, 31, 37, 44, 50, 59, and 74.

linked maxims. The major concerns of Laozi fall into two groups of three topics. The first group refers to the world: being, cosmos, and what might be called "cosmic" or "sacred" time; the second group refers to people: ethics, the state, and the life of the spirit. These skeins of meaning combine to form a profound worldview which still allures and puzzles people. Many English versions of the Tao Te Ching have been written. According to Mircea Eliade, the Tao Te Ching is "the most profound and most enigmatic text in all Chinese literature." The chapters of the Tao Te Ching may be studied together, given the scheme just discussed, to grasp their linked meanings better.

THE TRUTH OF BEING

The famous first line of the Tao Te Ching, "The Tao that can be told of is not the Absolute Tao; the Names that can be given are not Absolute Names" (1), abstracts the vital message of the book itself. Surely, the central notion of the Tao Te Ching is the Tao. Best rendered as "way," for Laozi the Tao is, quite simply, the Real. Why this word and not some other best names the Real is the main subject of the Tao Te Ching, and will become clearer as we progress. Given the insight that the Tao is the Real, we can restate Lin Yutang's version of the first line of the Tao Te Ching as follows: "The real that can be talked about [i.e., the world of the senses] is not the True Real." That is to say, the main premise of the Tao Te Ching is that the Thought of the Spirit is the Real. Laozi doesn't believe that the Real is just matter. For Laozi, the world of the senses and mental knowledge, the world of names and forms, is not the Real, but part of the Real. The Tao is the ground, essence, and truth of the world, but not only that which is known. The dyad of the Tao and the world also poses a problem, which the Tao Te Ching seeks to explain: How is it that the world and the Tao are not just the same?

First, the Tao cannot be thought about. The Tao cannot be described ("told of") using words or language ("the Names"). On the other hand, the Tao is the model of what can be described, since "that [which] can be told of" is also the Tao, and "the Names that can be given" have as their models the "Absolute Names." The mention of "Absolute Names" suggests Plato's teaching of Forms: abstract thoughts which alone make up the Real and which create the mirage of things, like shadows cast by objects on the walls of a cave in the light of a central fire.

Because the Tao cannot be thought about, it cannot be known. Why this must be true will be discussed later on. Because the Tao cannot be sensed, it cannot be studied. On the other hand, since the Tao is the ground of reason and the senses, it is known and studied all the time, but none of that reveals the essence of the Tao. Since the Tao is the essence of all things, it is also the essence of the self. Therefore, it seems that the self can know the Tao in itself. That in the self which knows the Tao is the mind. Although the Tao itself cannot be known or studied, how the Tao appears to one who knows it can be hinted at by means of symbols, which bypass logic and words to appeal straight to the mind. Thus, Laozi uses many symbols and lyric turns of phrase to help describe what the Tao is like: the Mother of All Things, the Secret of Life, the Cosmic Mystery, the Mystery, the Deeper Mystery, the Gate to the Secret of All Life, a hollow vessel, the fountain head of all things, deep water, a bellows, the core, the Spirit of the Valley, the Mystic Female, the Door of the Mystic Female, the root of Heaven and Earth, water, the One, vital force, a newborn babe, Mystic vision, the Gate of Heaven, the Mystic Virtue, the nave of the wheel, not-being, empty space, non-existence, the belly, the Invisible, the Inaudible, the Intangible, the Form of the Formless, the Image of Nothingness, the Elusive, the Primeval Beginnings, a piece of uncarved wood, murky water, the basis of Quietude, the root (soil), the Eternal Law, Enlightenment, Nature, original nature, awakening, a fool, the Mother, Character, the life-force, the Father of All Things, the model of the world, Great, the original point, the Solid, the Quiescent, the Centre, the Light, the subtle secret, the mysterious secret of the universe, the ravine of the world, the eternal power, the Primordial Nothingness, God's own Vessel, a flood, the Great Symbol, the Subtle Light, the Nameless pristine simplicity, the fruit, the life-giving power, the ennobling power, Non-being, truth, fulfilment, harmony, that-which-is-without-form, the teaching without words, no action, the highest perfection, the greatest abundance, contentment, Heaven, a harbour, the Mother of Universe, the Absolute, Austere Knowledge, the Main Path, the Mystic Unity, the Normal, the Female of the world, the treasure of the world, the Grand Harmony, jade, and the Way of the Sage.

The utter darkness of the Tao – "Invisible," "Inaudible," and "Intangible" (14; cf. 35) – leads to the main symbol of a primal and fecund void, empty space, or nothing. It would be a mistake, though, to posit the void as

somehow above or before the world. To posit the Tao in this way leads to the absurd query: Why is there something and not nothing? Laozi makes it very clear that the Tao is not other than the world. The Tao is, rather, the truth of the world, seen in and through the world of the senses, but that which is known through the senses is not all there is to know. Knowing what is known through the senses using the mind leads to the view that there is something else. Thus, the Tao and the world do not just negate each other, as in early Buddhism, but the world and the Tao are more like part (the world) and whole (the Tao), or seeming (the world) and essence (the Tao). Therefore, the Tao Te Ching avoids the view that the essence of the world is twofold.

Also, there is no hint of theism in the Tao Te Ching. Although in later Taoist books the Tao is often described as a person, Laozi does not address or refer to the Tao as having any kind of ego, despite his use of male and, more often, female symbols: "I do not know whose Son it is, an image of what existed before God" (4); "Before the Heaven and Earth existed there was something nebulous: silent, isolated, standing alone, changing not, eternally revolving without fail, worthy to be the Mother of All Things" (25). The Tao itself is not a person: "Nature is unkind: it treats the creation like sacrificial straw-dogs" (5). On the other hand, to model oneself after the Tao is the touchstone of human ethics and the essence of our human nature, as of all else. Only in this sense can the Tao be said to be any sort of person. Truly, human nature is the self-conscious knowledge of the Tao: "Tao is Great, the Heaven is great, the Earth is great, the King is also great. These are the Great Four in the universe, and the King is one of them" (25). The "king" knows the Tao. Yet when we search for that knowledge, there is nothing there, or at least nothing that can be spoken in words.

It is a maxim of thinking about the nature of being that only mind and matter can be known. Since it is not certain that mind and matter are the same, to avoid the view that the essence of the world is twofold one must reduce one to the other, or say that the Real transcends and combines the aspects of both. Also, if one tries to reduce one to the other one must explain how it is that they come to differ. Since neither mind nor matter implies the other as a matter of logic, the Real must come first: "These two (the Secret and its manifestations) are (in their nature) the same; they are given different names when they become manifest" (1). The sameness of mind and matter implies that the essence of mind is matter, but that the

essence of matter is also mind. The latter teaching has profound results. The view that mind and matter are both real is not the view that only matter is real, which holds that mind is only matter. The belief that the Real transcends both mind and matter implies that mind and matter change into each other, and is one possible view of the belief that the Thought of the Spirit is the Real; the other view is that matter does not exist as such and is only mind, "matter" being like a shadow of the senses cast upon the mind. The former is the view of the nature of being of the Tao Te Ching; the latter is the view of the nature of being of early Buddhism.

COSMOS

In the section above, we discussed the notion of the Absolute Tao, which we linked with zero ("the Primordial Nothingness"). In the Tao Te Ching, the flux of the Tao is the primal cosmic process (as in modern physics, force and not matter comes first). The contrast between the Absolute Tao and "[t]he Tao that can be told of" implies a different view of the Tao, i.e., the being in the world of the Absolute Tao. The being in the world of the Tao, linked with the number one, is called De. Number symbols are plain in the Tao Te Ching: "Out of Tao, One is born; out of One, Two; out of Two, Three; out of Three, the created universe" (42). The Tao Te Ching's use of cosmic numbers predates but is very like the Hebrew Zohar, 1,600 years later, with its notion of ten sefirot or "numbers" which evolve in strict series out of a primal "nothing," the Ein, through one (keter) and a primal dyad (chokmah or chokmah/binah). De is widely rendered as "power," "virtue," or "character." It is the same as the "life-force," which is therefore the truth of the world, given in and through matter. Therefore, the Tao Te Ching accounts for the riddle of life and the coming into being of living matter in a way which the Buddhist view of the nature of being fails to do, except perhaps in its Tantric forms, yet even the Tantric Buddhist is mainly concerned with giving up and going beyond the world of the senses. Next after the number one comes the dyad of yin and yang: "The created universe carries the yin at its back and the yang in front" (42). The two poles of yin and yang are the primal pair, which create and sustain all things. The yin is widely linked with darkness, the passive, and the female symbol. The yang is widely linked with light, the active,

and the male symbol. Thus, in the Tao Te Ching, sex is a primal force that runs throughout all things. According to Schuhmacher and Woerner,

> Originally the word yin designated the northern slope of a mountain, i.e., the side facing away from the sun – and was further associated with cold, turgid water and a cloud-covered sky. Yang denoted the mountain slope facing the sun and was associated with brightness and warmth. ... yin is the feminine, the passive, the receptive, the dark, the soft. Symbols of yin are the moon, water, clouds, the tiger, the turtle, the colour black, the north, lead, and all even numbers. Yang corresponds to what is masculine, active, creative, bright, and hard. Symbols of yang are the sun, fire, the dragon, the colour red, the south, mercury, and all odd numbers.

In the Tao Te Ching, the primal dyad only seems to be set against itself. This teaching is shown in a famous picture, called the Taijitu. In this picture, the light half of the circle represents the yin pole, the dark half the yang. However, in the light half there is a dark dot; in the dark half, there is a light dot. The dark dot is a symbol for the secret yang pole hidden in yin. The light dot represents the secret yin pole hidden in yang. The Taijitu is a symbol of the two poles changing into each other, which, more than 2,000 years before Hegel, is a major teaching of the Tao Te Ching:

> When the people of the Earth all know beauty as beauty, There arises (the recognition of) ugliness.
> When the people of the Earth all know the good as good, There arises (the recognition of) evil.
> Therefore:
> Being and non-being interdepend in growth; Difficult and easy interdepend in completion; Long and short interdepend in contrast;
> High and low interdepend in position; Tones and voice interdepend in harmony; Front and behind interdepend in company. (2)

Also, the whole yin-yang symbol is itself a dot, which implies an endless series, like a fractal. The ceaseless ebb and flow of yin and yang, in which each changes into the other when it reaches its furthest limit, is called "enantiodromia."

In the last section, we said that reason cannot go beyond the primal pair. Since the Real, viz., the oneness of Tao (0) and De (1), lies beyond the poles of yin and yang, reason cannot know it. This limit is implied by the basic nature of thinking, which is based on Aristotle's law that A and not-A cannot be the same (the "law of contradiction"). Since the Real unites and goes beyond the dyad, thinking cannot reach it. This teaching leads to a unique view, discussed below in the section on "Ethics." Since the Tao is the essence of the self, it also implies that there is a higher function of the self than reason or sensing.

The congress of the primal pair, impelled by the guiding power of the De and the Real, leads to the flux of things that is the story of the world. The congress of the primal pair results in ever-greater flux, which, still working out the basic law of yin and yang, appears as the two poles of "heaven" and "earth." The main theory of the cosmos today, the teaching of science concerning the "big bang," describes a world that begins in a tiny "singularity" (oneness, monad), to which the laws of physics do not seem to apply, of great power and mass, and over time coming out of its primal power ever more and more complex and dense beings linked with the loss of power in which, after billions of years, living beings seem to appear out of nothing. It comes as a surprise, perhaps, to learn that the modern theory of the first cause in all its basic details is like Laozi's view of the cosmos. One must guard against the mistake of taking the symbol for the real (called "hypostatization"). The symbol of "heaven" refers to the sky, with its clockwork, rhythmic cycles and fixed laws. Today we would call "heaven" the "laws of physics." The "earth" refers to the world of living beings, including people, with their pell-mell conduct in which one can still see the basic exchange of yin and yang, but out of sync with any higher law, implying some sort of freedom.

Out of the ebb and flow of all things the primal and fecund Tao becomes ever more and more obscured by change, so that slowly, over billions of years, all things become more and more dense and at odds (today we would call this "entropy"). Finally, the Tao is no longer seen by most, and perfect cosmos becomes perfect chaos, followed by death and, in accord with the notion of enantiodromia, rebirth ("negentropy"). This cyclic change between life, death, and rebirth is cosmic, endless, and works on many levels. On the largest level, it alludes to the increase and decrease of the world, a teaching that is also basic to the point of view of science today.

On the social level, it alludes to the rise and fall of cultures. And on the level of the person, it alludes to life, death, and rebirth after the law of karma.

SACRED AND PROFANE TIME

In the last section, we described the flux of the Tao as a process of growing darkness. It follows from this teaching that time itself is debased. This was surely the view of Laozi, who says that the rise of manners (linked with the Confucian cult, which he opposed, but which today we might call "secular humanism") with "the decline of the great Tao" (18; cf. 32). Thus, the Tao Te Ching is mainly concerned with how to return to the primal human state, which is, ipso facto, perfect. Once again, we must guard against reifying this teaching into a theory of a perfect earthly state (the legend of Shambhala comes to mind), or a theory of a primal divine "soft-boned" human race of the North[140] for neither of which is there any clear historical basis. The basic teaching here is that the perfect primal human state occurs outside time. The indigenous Australians have a like notion in their teaching of the "dreamtime," a primal state of oneness with nature, livened by primal forces and symbols, from which people have devolved and to which they should seek to return (and will, when the flux of time has reached its furthest limit). According to Laozi, this primal state of oneness with the Tao has many useful values, including order, goodness, wealth, and wise rule, whereas the flux of the Tao throughout time results in their reverse: chaos, greed, lack, sickness, and bad rule, all increasing:

> There were those in ancient times possessed of the One:
> Through possession of the One, the Heaven was clarified,
> Through possession of the One, the Earth was stabilized,
> Through possession of the One, the gods were spiritualized,
> Through possession of the One, the valleys were made full,
> Through possession of the One, all things lived and grew,
> Through possession of the One, the princes and dukes became ennobled of the people.
> That was how each became so.
> Without clarity, the Heavens would shake,
> Without stability, the Earth would quake,

[140] See, e.g., Evola, *Taoism*.

Without spiritual power, the gods would crumble,
Without being filled, the valleys would crack,
Without life-giving power, all things would perish,
Without the ennobling power, the princes and dukes would stumble. (39)

Laozi also refers to how "the wise ones of old" look from the point of view of the modern, base epoch:

The wise ones of old had subtle wisdom and depth of understanding,
So profound that they could not be understood.
And because they could not be understood,
Perforce must they be so described:
Cautious, like crossing a wintry stream,
Irresolute, like one fearing danger all around,
Grave, like one acting as guest,
Self-effacing, like ice beginning to melt,
Genuine, like a piece of undressed wood,
Open-minded, like a valley,
And mixing freely, like murky water. (15)

It does not follow from our caution above that a primal human culture did not flourish. The standard protest against the presence of such a centre is that there are no hard facts. But, by Laozi's own account, such a culture enjoyed a state of perfect oneness with nature and may have left little or no trace. This is even truer if it is hundreds of thousands or millions of years old (current knowledge says that fire was discovered about a million years ago, so we know human beings have been sentient for at least that long), instead of tens of thousands of years or small and local, or it may represent an astral, non-earthly culture which was reborn on this planet (in a recent talk the Dalai Lama said that to see Shambhala one must be able to move faster than the speed of light). Absence of proof is not proof of absence. What do we really know of the inner state of the first people? In fact, science has found the remains of a primal global shamans' culture which is at least 40,000 years old, scattered in remnants across the world: in the native cultures of North and South America, amongst the aboriginal Australians, in early African and European tribes, in the cults of the Middle East, and in Far Eastern Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist, and Shinto beliefs, most evolved in Tantra, and mainly in Tibet, all of which seem to

share a strange likeness of teaching and practice, joined around the central notion of a return to a primal blissful state of being, and set against the Confucian/Semitic cult of moral law, which appears later. If the shamans' culture were indeed primal, this would explain both its wide extent and its debased state.

ETHICS

In the section above on "Cosmos", we discussed the oneness of the Tao and the De, and compared that oneness with the primal polar pair, which comes after it. For Laozi, ethics consists in copying the highest (the Tao). Therefore, good and evil are not always against each other, nor are ethics alone enough to be saved: "Between 'Ah!' and 'Ough!' how much difference is there? Between 'good and evil', how much difference is there? That which men fear is indeed to be feared; but, alas, distant yet is the dawn (of awakening)!" (20); "the good man is the Teacher of the bad, and the bad man is the lesson of the good" (27); "Tao is the mysterious secret of the universe, the good man's treasure, and the bad man's refuge.... Though there be bad people, why reject them?" (62); "The good ones I declare good; the bad ones I also declare good" (49). It follows that the Tao is beyond good and evil, and can appear to the world to be "good" or "evil" after the point of view of the subject. And since most of the world is no longer aligned with the Tao, it brands as "evil" what it does not know. Thus, there are no moral laws or rules that are always true. The sheer genius of such a teaching needs only to be pointed out. That it does not follow that evil is always really good is clear from a close reading of the Tao Te Ching, which contains accounts of Taoist ethics after a second notion, which follows from the cosmic teaching of the oneness of the poles: that the world responds to one as one responds to the world. From this Laozi creates a doubtless set of Taoist virtues, strangely based on the disproof of good and evil: not craving, no conflict, and the practice of meekness, shame, mildness, fairness, mercy, thrift, quiet, content, goodness, cunning, a grave nature, fineness, and modest speech. The practice of these virtues will prepare the seeker for the knowledge of the Tao, and are thus the first step in the return of the world to the Tao, but do not themselves equal the Way of the Tao itself. Who has known the Tao can appear any way they choose, i.e., they are above good and evil, but it does not follow that all evil persons know the Tao. Such a teaching

really is only for those who know the Tao. Therefore, it is the highest moral teaching.

THE STATE

The Tao Te Ching talks about the art of good rule. All primal beliefs have moral meanings and therefore meanings for the state, but the meanings for the state are often inferred from the ethics later on or eschewed as not proper to the life of the spirit: in the Tao Te Ching the meanings for the state are plain. Laozi wants to return people back to their basic perfect state through turning away from the trappings of time and going back to the primal Tao: "Banish wisdom, discard knowledge, and the people shall profit a hundredfold; banish 'humanity,' discard 'justice,' and the people shall recover love of their kin; banish cunning, discard 'utility,' and the thieves and brigands shall disappear" (19); "When the world lives in accord with Tao, racing horses are turned back to haul refuse carts" (46). Laozi foresees a time when the flux of time will have reached its furthest limit, at which point it shall change – an enantiodromia: "There are those who will conquer the world and make of it (what they conceive or desire). I see that they will not succeed. (For) the world is God's own vessel. It cannot be made (by human interference). He who makes it spoils it. He who holds it loses it" (29). This is called the return to the Tao, and it seems to follow from the view of being and time of the Tao Te Ching.

The Tao Te Ching clearly sees that the people and the rulers complete each other, and therefore posits the need for a ruling class, with the same kinship between the people and the rulers as between yin and yang: "the nobility depend upon the common man for support, and the exalted ones depend upon the lowly for their base" (39). The ruling class should aspire to know the Tao, and their leaders should be those who have reached this knowledge: "If princes and dukes can keep the Tao, the world will of its own accord be reformed" (37). They should rule by means of Taoist ethics, subtly, behind the scenes, with low taxes and with great cunning and mildness, almost hidden away. The people shall be the makers of the wealth of the land, simple, scattered, untaught, and free. Complex machines are given up:

> (Let there be) a small country with a small population,

Where the supply of goods are tenfold or hundredfold, more than they can use.
Let the people value their lives and not migrate far.
Though there be boats and carriages,
None be there to ride them.
Though there be armour and weapons,
No occasion to display them.
Let the people again tie ropes for reckoning,
Let them enjoy their food,
Beautify their clothing,
Be satisfied with their homes,
Delight in their customs.
The neighbouring settlements overlook one another
So that they can hear the barking of dogs and crowing of cocks of their neighbours,
And the people till the end of their days shall never have been outside their own country. (80)

The Tao Te Ching's view of the state speaks strongly to the problem of modern Western people, slaves to machines, oppressed by chaos, awash in their own poisons, dazzled by glamour, controlled and used for their labour, and ever more subject to the total rule of money as the whole system declines. Now, perhaps 2,500 years after the time of Laozi, it appears that Laozi's warning is coming true. The growth of work and machines – what Buckminster Fuller calls the "acceleration of ephemeralization" – is about to reach its furthest limit. The question must be asked, then, how do the teachings of the Tao Te Ching help us to get through the rough waters ahead? While a fundamentalist interpretation of Laozi's precepts is probably impossible today, it seems that a Taoist plan for the modern day would have to include this list:

- post-industrialism;
- environmentalism;
- sustainable design;
- minimalism;
- rural revival;
- decentralization;
- sustainable population growth;
- self-sufficiency;
- anti-elitism;
- cultural enrichment;
- participatory governance;
- abolition of capital punishment and punitive laws;
- gradual legal reform;
- local community empowerment;
- demilitarization;
- fostering cooperation and mutual aid;
- localism.

In his basic notion of an ideal culture based on giving up all forms of falseness, ruled by noble sages who are bound to the people, in a culture of the land, Laozi is close to Plato's *Republic*.

THE SCIENCE OF THE SPIRIT

Of the six topics described herein, the largest part of the Tao Te Ching by far (about 40%) is about the science of the spirit, called "soteriology." For Laozi, the science of the spirit is all about going back to the Tao. Ethics alone are not enough for finding the Tao within oneself, although they are the basis. To truly know the Tao in oneself involves a basic change of the whole self, which is achieved by very few. For those who do achieve it, Laozi says that one will enjoy nothing less than the knowledge of the Real, health, long life, and the timeless state after the death of the body. About the nature of the deathless state itself, Laozi is silent. The deathless state is only for those who have achieved "at-one-ment" with the Tao. As to what one is in one's essence, that will become one's fate at the moment of death: "He who follows the Tao is identified with the Tao. He who follows Character (Teh) is identified with Character. He who abandons (Tao) is identified with abandonment (of Tao). He who is identified with Tao – Tao

is also glad to welcome him. He who is identified with Character – Character is also glad to welcome him. He who is identified with abandonment – abandonment is also glad to welcome him" (23).

To achieve "at-one-ment" with the Tao, Laozi prescribes a number of tasks, very like our discussion of "Ethics," but applied inside rather than outside. Of these the first and foremost is "doing nothing": "The student of knowledge (aims at) learning day by day; the student of Tao (aims at) losing day by day. By continual losing one reaches doing nothing (laissez-faire). By doing nothing everything is done" (48). "Doing nothing" does not mean stasis, but rather no conflict, even while living in the world (one cannot give up the world, since it is also Tao). Allow life to move in accord with its own nature, and all things achieve the nature proper to them, and all things, oneself and the world (to the extent that one is part of it) become perfect. "Doing nothing" is like the yin pole, which is closer to the Tao than the yang and therefore the pole through which one transcends the dyad and achieves "at-one-ment." "At-one-ment" is a real state in which all one's knots are untied, and all things achieve perfect concord. "Doing nothing" includes being without desire, giving up the self, leading a simple life, thinking about profound things, self-control, and quiet: "Attain the utmost in Passivity, hold firm to the basis of Quietude" (16).

Those who have achieved oneness with the Tao are the proper rulers of the people. Today, they are scattered and few. No one can transmit the knowledge of the Tao to anyone else, and only one who knows the Tao can perceive it in another. Therefore, oneness with the Tao is very hard to attain. Many people have never heard of it.

Abbreviations

V	Vinaya
DN	Digha Nikaya
EA	Edicts of Asoka
KN	Khuddaka Nikaya
MN	Majjhima Nikaya
PED	Pali-English Dictionary
SN	Samyutta Nikaya
Sn	Sutta Nipata
AN	Anguttara Nikaya

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Mahavastu
Pali Canon
Plato's Republic
Prajnaparamita
Q
Quran
Rigveda
Samayabhedoparacanacakra
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About the Author

Alexander Duncan, also known as Seten Tomh, is a notable figure in the field of spirituality and religious studies. He has contributed to various areas of thought, often exploring themes related to Buddhism, mysticism, and esoteric traditions. While he may not be as widely recognized as some other figures in the spiritual domain, his work has resonated with those who are deeply interested in these subjects.

Under the name Seten Tomh, Duncan has delved into Buddhist philosophy, particularly exploring the intricacies of early Buddhist schools and their doctrinal differences. His work often reflects a deep understanding of Buddhist concepts and their application in contemporary spiritual practice.

As Seten Tomh, Duncan has authored various texts that delve into mystical and esoteric traditions. His writings often explore the intersection of spirituality, philosophy, and mysticism, offering insights into the nature of consciousness and spiritual awakening.

Duncan's work has garnered a following among those interested in esoteric spirituality, Buddhist philosophy, and the deeper aspects of religious study. His contributions are particularly valued in niche communities that seek a more profound understanding of these topics.

Through his writings and teachings, Duncan has aimed to educate others on complex spiritual and philosophical ideas, making them accessible to those who are genuinely interested in exploring these fields.

While Alexander Duncan (Seten Tomh) may not be as widely known as some other spiritual teachers, his contributions to the study of Buddhism, mysticism, and esotericism have made a significant impact on those who have engaged with his work. His writings and teachings continue to influence individuals seeking a deeper understanding of spirituality and the human experience.